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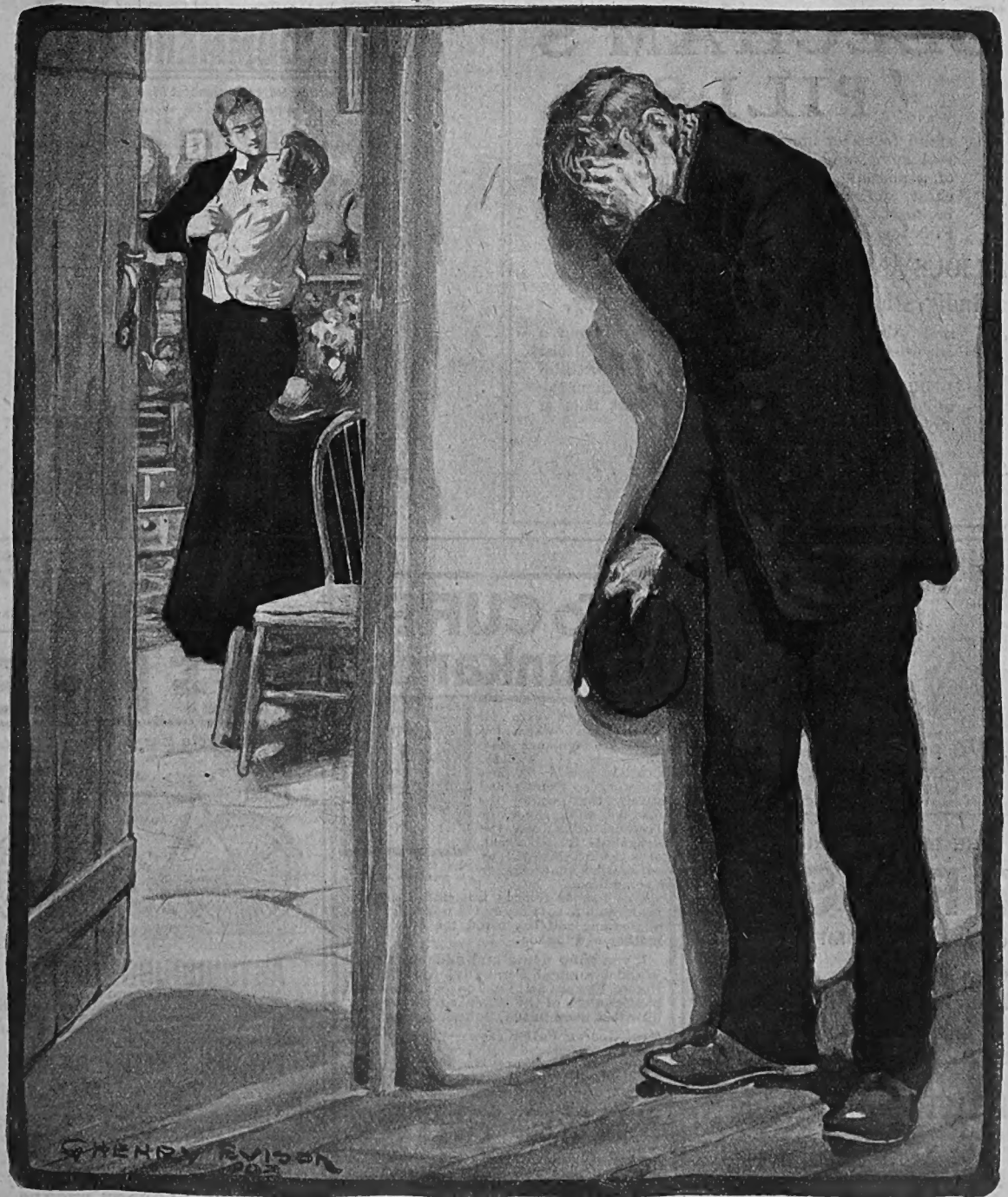


The diver covered his face with his hand. "Sir Guy loves her," he whispered, "and she—she loves him. I have lost her—lost her after all!" * * * *

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*(A Dramatic Incident from our New Serial Story, "HELD APART." See Inside.)*

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## THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Moira Davenal is sitting in the little cottage on Groudle Quay busy with her ribbon work. Sir Guy Vanbrugh is talking to her.

"Moira, have I the least little bit of a chance?"

"I—I don't know, Sir Guy," she falters. "I never thought about you seriously; and they would all say I married you for your money!"

"Then there is a chance for me," he says, biting his lip. "Moira, I love you so much. Won't you——"

He pauses. There is a heavy step in the hallway of the cottage, and a burly figure enters the room.

"Good evening, Mr. Davenal. I'm off to London for the week-end and was just leaving a message for you with your daughter. How goes on the task of raising the *Sylph?*"

"I've found the last hole, Sir Guy," says John Davenal, who is a diver engaged in raising Sir Guy's yacht. "She'll soon be afloat."

After Sir Guy has gone a sailor appears at the door singing in drunken tones the scrap of a chorus:

"*Give my love to Nancy, the girl that I adore,*
*Tell her that she'll never see her—her sailor any more.*"

"I want to see Davenal—John Davenal," he says thickly.

The diver rises to his feet.

"Hullo, Hartigan!" he remarks loudly. "Glad to see you. Come in and make yourself comfortable."

While Moira goes out on an errand a conversation takes place between the two men, from which it appears that Moira is really Hartigan's daughter. Davenal agrees to pay him £50 a year so that he may keep her.

The sailor—who is a ship's steward—sits back in his chair and begins to sing again the drunken chorus.

He halts abruptly, for the door slowly opens, and a blind woman comes in.

Dennis Hartigan recognises her as his sister Kate. She tells her brother that she heard the song he was singing—sung in just the same way—once when she was sitting on a breakwater at Groudle. She also adds that the man who was singing said, evidently to someone with him: "This is out far enough. In with it;" after which there was a splash.

Hannah Davenal (Hartigan's wife and the diver's sister) is maid to Lady Tarleton. She is possessed of a secret with which she continually blackmails her mistress.

One afternoon Lady Tarleton and Hannah Davenal go down to Groudle Tower, and together they make a mysterious journey at midnight.

The following day, at the Half Brick Inn at Groudle, Hannah encounters her husband, whom she advises to leave Groudle.

The next morning Hannah is found dead in bed, a towel smelling of chloroform is on her face, and over that a pillow on which are some dirty finger marks.

The police are informed of the tragedy, and Detective-Sergeant Ussher is sent down from Scotland Yard to investigate. The information he obtains decides him to arrest Dennis Hartigan.

Edward Stormont, the owner of Groudle Tower, and Lady Tarleton's brother-in-law, now arrives at Groudle with his friend Paul Jerome, a war-correspondent. When they enter the Tower Lady Tarleton is observed facing four men, who are Hartigan, Ussher, and two policemen, guarding the ship's steward.

As Stormont pauses in the doorway of the hall Lady Tarleton glances up and sees him. The prisoner is speaking defiantly.

"I'm Dennis Hartigan all right," he says, "and Hannah Davenal's husband all right. But I'm innocent of her death, and I'm here to prove it. I want one word—one single word—alone with her ladyship."

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Edward Stormont

## SEVENTH CHAPTER.

### "Welcome to Groudle Tower."

Lady Tarleton gazed irresolutely at the handcuffed captive. Dennis Hartigan, standing passively between the two country policemen, answered the gaze with a stare of grim and significant defiance. Lady Tarleton's gaze fell, then travelled to the stalwart figure of Edward Stormont, checked on his own threshold by so singular a spectacle. She moved with eager steps towards him. She was very agitated.

"Edward!" she exclaimed, "is it really you? Good Heavens, and I did not know you were in England!"

Her brother-in-law took the hand she extended to him.

"I only landed at Hull last night, and the whim seized me to see Groudle once again before coming south. I had no idea you were in residence, till they told me at the station that some more or less tragic event had occurred here. You are, I gather, in the throes of a police investigation. But I am forgetting. Allow me to introduce you to Mr. Jerome."

He turned to his companion. "Jerome," he observed—"Lady Tarleton, my sister-in-law. Jerome, my dear Adeline, has plucked a peaceful laurel-wreath out of the perils of modern warfare. In other words, he has scored the latest success in war-correspondence. Notwithstanding which, he remains the most modest of men."

Lady Tarleton forced a smile. "I am very glad to make Mr. Jerome's acquaintance," she replied, giving the war-correspondent the tips of her fingers, "but I wish that he had reached Groudle Tower at a juncture not quite so melancholy. Davenal, my maid, was found this morning dead in her room, under circumstances that point, almost conclusively, to murder. Mr. Ussher!"

She motioned to the detective. He crossed the hall to her side, closing his note-book; he had been writing in it.

"Mr. Ussher," she said, "this is Mr. Stormont, my brother-in-law. Mr. Stormont, as you may know, is the owner of Groudle Tower. Will you please explain to him why you arrested this man, and particularly why you have brought him here."

"Certainly, my lady," answered Mr. Ussher blandly, and drew a pace nearer to Edward Stormont.

"You see, sir," he pursued, "the woman Davenal had evidently been chloroformed and then suffocated—with a pillow. The pillow had apparently been handled by a person of the lower class—it was much finger-marked, showing that the murderer's hands had been the reverse of clean. That was one clue. I ascertained without delay what purchases of chloroform had been lately made in Groudle. I discovered that a quantity had been sold to a certain Dennis Hartigan, who wrote in the poison-register of the chemist from whom it was bought the address 'Hawthorn Cottage, Groudle Quay.' Hawthorn Cottage is the residence of John Davenal, the brother of the deceased. That was clue number two."

The detective started. His glance had encountered that of the war-correspondent. Mr. Ussher bowed and lifted two fingers to his forehead. Paul Jerome nodded familiarly.

"Don't let me interrupt you, Ussher," he remarked, "though I was wondering how long you would be in recognising a friend. You are in excellent hands, Lady Tarleton," he added; "Mr. Ussher and I met often at one time—drawn together by the bonds that unite the police and the press—and I can assure you that he is a most zealous and considerate officer."

Mr. Ussher coughed modestly.

"Mr. Jerome is too kind, my lady," he declared. "But I was about to inform Mr. Stormont, my lady, that on finding chloroform had recently been supplied to a person apparently connected with the Davenal family, I traced that person, and learnt that he was lodging at an inn just outside Groudle town."

Edward Stormont chafed visibly.

"May I remind you, Mr.—Mr. Ussher," he remarked, "that your prisoner, whom I conclude to be the Hartigan you speak of, has offered to prove his innocence, and has asked to have a moment's conversation with Lady Tarleton. That is a most extraordinary request. Perhaps you would be good enough to say exactly what accusation is made against him. I believe he said something about being 'innocent of her death.'"

The detective regarded the speaker tolerantly, yet with a distinct air of reproof.

"The prisoner," he rejoined, "undoubtedly lies under suspicion in connection with the murder of his wife, although I have not yet formally charged him. Not only, however, did he purchase the chloroform to which I have referred, but he is known to have quarrelled with the deceased at the 'Half Brick'—the inn in question—over a kiss, begging her ladyship's pardon, given to a serving-maid. An ostler at the 'Half Brick,' returning from town, saw and recognised Miss Davenal—that is to say, Mrs. Hartigan. She was with the prisoner. They were then at some distance from the inn, and she was heard to say: 'If he happens to have a wife like me, Dennis!'"

Lady Tarleton was plucking at the lace handkerchief in her fingers; she turned her head to glance at the short, thick-set form between the constables. Dennis Hartigan was looking at her, his bold blue eyes anxious yet vaguely cruel.

"Mr. Stormont has reminded you, Mr. Ussher," she said, "that this person has asserted his desire to prove his innocence, and has asked for a single word—by which I presume he means a few minutes' conversation—alone with me. Did you bring him here in order to suggest that I should grant this request?"

Mr. Ussher rubbed his deep and dimpled chin with the butt of his pencil.

"Well, my lady," he responded, "I was in somewhat of a quandary. The prisoner asserted that your ladyship could prove his innocence, and demanded to be confronted, if I may use the term, my lady, with you. Naturally, I shrank from lodging a definite charge while there was any possibility, however remote, of my being on the wrong track."

The detective coloured slightly and he averted his glance from that of the war-correspondent. For some reason or other Paul Jerome had been unable to repress a smile.

"But it was not until he got face to face with your ladyship," continued Mr. Ussher, "that he blurted out the request for a private interview. I am bound to confess, my lady, that that would be a most unusual proceeding, and for the life of me, my lady, I fail to see how it can help him. Any facts which might be within the present knowledge of your ladyship, could not be affected—at all events, legally—by such an interview."

Lady Tarleton waved him aside and stepped past him. A close observer might have doubted if it were by accident or with intent that she had moved to a position where, though she faced the policemen and their captive, her features were in shadow. She directed herself imperiously to Dennis Hartigan.

"What do you want with me," she asked—"tell me frankly? If you are an innocent man, you have the right to claim our sympathy under this terrible charge. You say you are the husband of my maid, Hannah Davenal?"

Dennis Hartigan studied her expression; his eyes seemed to be reading her very soul.

"Yes, my lady," she was told, "as you know, my lady, she was married. I am aware your ladyship wasn't acquainted with my name, but she explained, I believe, that I was a ship's steward; you remember, my lady, when she warned you she'd be wanting to leave, as I was giving up the sea and planning to take a country public-house with her. Now what I want your ladyship to tell the police is that you promised Hannah a money-present when she left—a very handsome present, my lady, but she'd been your maid for over twenty years. I won't be particular to the exact amount, but it was enough to buy us a very good business, my lady."

"Yes," said Lady Tarleton slowly, "that is so. I promised

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to give her some hundreds of pounds, and—to lend her as much more as she needed."

The other straightened himself, shrugged his shoulders, and looked round at his captors—at the imperturbable Mr. Ussher, at Edward Stormont, and Paul Jerome, at the curious servants who lingered about the extremities of the great hall.

"So she told me, my lady," he answered, "and what I ask is, would I have been fool enough, for a few words over a chance peck at a pretty mouth, to do away with my poor Hannah and lose myself three fat figures in solid cash? For it stands to reason that you weren't going to give me the money, my lady, if anything happened to Hannah before she left your service."

Mr. Ussher wrinkled his brows and bit at his pencil. But he gave no other sign of interest in his prisoner's observations.

"And as for the chloroform I bought," added Dennis Hartigan scornfully, "I got it for John Davenal's ear-ache; he's a diver and suffers with his ears. But the stuff I used there and left there, and there's witnesses to that."

Lady Tarleton put the twisted handkerchief to her lips, she had scarcely marked the latter portion of Dennis Hartigan's defence.

"There is common sense in what you say about your monetary loss by your wife's death," she observed, "and so far I can support at least the probability of your innocence. But I can do nothing more."

Dennis Hartigan sprang suddenly clear of his flanking guardians, fell at her feet, and clutched her gown. His tanned, bloated face peered up into hers with a pretended frenzy.

"Don't desert me, my lady!" he cried. "I am innocent!" He dropped his voice to a whisper and a sentence reached her, and her alone, an instant before the two constables, darting forward, had pinned and dragged him up. Lady Tarleton staggered. His fierce words rang hissingly in her ear.

"*The child, you fool! Save me, or I speak!*"

She felt a strong arm about her shoulder. It was that of Paul Jerome; he had noticed the sick spasm that had swayed her. He drew her aside.

"Permit me," he said, "this is all rather trying, isn't it? But I don't think the fellow meant you any harm—he was only unstrung. After all, I fancy Ussher is on the wrong track, and not for the first time. Stormont!"

The war-correspondent was calling to his host, who, irritable and amazed, watched the abruptly metamorphosed scene.

"Lady Tarleton is a little agitated," he added; "if you will stay with her I will go and talk to Mr. Ussher, whom I know of old. He is a little afraid of me; as a young and enthusiastic journalist I upset one or two of his best 'clues' in a famous criminal case."

He resigned Lady Tarleton into the care of the elder man, and went across to the detective, who was superintending an alteration in his prisoner's fetters. Dennis Hartigan's hands were being secured behind his back.

"Ussher," said the war-correspondent, "one moment." The detective spun about, a look of veiled hostility on his bland, secretive countenance. Paul Jerome regarded him amusedly.

"You spoke of a soiled and finger-marked pillow," he continued in an undertone. "Now surely those finger-marks will soon show you if you ought to charge this luckless wretch with the murder or not."

Mr. Ussher's jaw dropped. The war-correspondent smiled at his change of demeanour.

"If I might suggest," he said, "your prisoner could be taken to the station and detained for an hour or two. That will enable you to make at your leisure the necessary examination of the finger-prints—any ordinary magnifying glass will serve your purpose. Some trifling expedient will allow you to compare them with your prisoner's finger-tips, and you'll act accordingly. But understand, I do not advise, I merely suggest. Good night, Mr. Ussher."

He nodded pleasantly and withdrew a few paces. The detective pulled himself together and gave the order to his men. Then the three marched off with the handcuffed ship's steward. Dennis Hartigan glanced back. Lady Tarleton saw the look, and leant heavily upon her brother-in-law. The war-correspondent went up to them.

"I perceive," he observed, "that Lady Tarleton has a certain sympathy with that poor beggar. So have I, I can't tell why. But in any case, if he is innocent, he will soon be free. I have provided Ussher with an infallible test."

Edward Stormont gave an arm to his sister-in-law, and led her out of the hall. Paul Jerome followed.

"I'm afraid, Jerome," said the elder man, "that this is rather an unexpected kind of welcome."

"Don't mention it," answered the war correspondent; "I'm only wondering if I shall turn out to have travelled three thousand miles for the especial purpose of—to put it vulgarly—'wiping Mr. Ussher's eye.' However, in a few hours his prisoner will be either free or else as good as found guilty."

Lady Tarleton opened her lips as if she would have answered. But she closed them again abruptly. When she spoke it was to remark that they must be both hungry and tired, and to suggest their dining forthwith.

## EIGHTH CHAPTER.

### Mr. Jerome was Quite Right.

"Yes, it's a fine old place, but dismal, my dear fellow, dismal! Even to a tenant who had not, as I have, the saddest of recollections associated with it, Groudle Tower would soon reveal itself as an excellent residence to live out of."

Edward Stormont, the war-correspondent at his side, was strolling through the long corridors of the ancient country seat upon which he had just passed so disparaging a criticism. He returned an unlighted cigar to its position between his sensitive, melancholy lips, and plunged his hands once more into the deep pockets of his loose lounge coat.

With his pointed, iron-grey beard, his dreamy blue eyes and negligent, abstracted bearing, Edward Stormont was a man of striking, almost poetic appearance. Few would have taken him for what he was, a daring explorer of the earth's wildest and most desert corners.

Pushing open a door, he ushered Paul Jerome into the apartment beyond, a huge, bare chamber with a high roof, carved oak wainscoting, and small, latticed panes in the big mullioned windows.

"Once upon a time," he said, taking the cigar from his mouth, "when the owners of Groudle Tower were great lords, and judges in their own right of half the county, this room was their court of summary jurisdiction. To this day it is called the justice-room. The roof is a splendid specimen of Jacobean vaulting."

He drew out a tiny gold case, raised the spring lid, and snapped it again.

"Have you a match, Jerome?" he asked; "I have not one left."

Jerome offered him a battered metal box, the explorer lit his Havana, and going to the window, flung the casement wide. It gave upon the large central square of the Tower. The sunshine of the spring morning lay across it, and the March wind whistled sharply past the stone framework of the window.

Edward Stormont stepped out, and glanced up at the ruinous, ivy-grown keep that rose at an angle of the square. The war-correspondent had followed him out.

"Twenty years ago, Jerome," remarked the elder man slowly, "I climbed that tower at night and, alone with the wind and the stars, fought my way back to sanity and self-control. Fate had dealt me a cruel blow, Jerome—a lovely young creature, whose heart and

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mind were stamped with a rarer charm than even her outward beauty, lay dead within these walls. A little baby girl was motherless, I, her father, robbed of an idolised wife that Death had scarcely spared to me for eighteen months."

His strong, grave voice faltered, and he was silent, his breast heaving.

"When we drove up the hill yesterday evening," he added abruptly, "the sight of the Tower brought it all back, and though I am a score of years older, Jerome, I could have wept aloud."

Edward Stormont's white teeth closed upon his cigar, a puff or two of smoke escaped from his lips. He sighed and walked onwards.

"I wish the little lass had lived," he exclaimed; "I have wanted something to love all these years, and though I have made friends with many a loyal brute and many an honest fellow, it has not filled the void in my heart. The wound death opened still bleeds, a daughter's hand might have—would have healed it. But a truce to this womanish talk—who comes yonder, is it not that solemn plain-clothes policeman whom we found in possession here last night?"

He shaded his eyes with his palm, and gazed across the courtyard. Paul Jerome glanced in the same direction. Mr. Ussher's large and stooping figure was passing through the massive entrance which gave admittance to Groudle Tower. His note-book was in his hand—he paused to make a memorandum in it, then looked up and saw them. Putting away the oblong red volume, he came forward athwart the smooth turf that occupied the middle of the square.

"Good day," he said, addressing Edward Stormont before recognising, with dry politeness, the presence of the war-correspondent. "I was about to seek a brief interview with you. An inquest will be necessary, but any wish that her ladyship or yourself may entertain as to time and place can, no doubt, be met. I have just left the coroner's officer, who will be here in the course of the morning."

Edward Stormont made an impatient gesture.

"Arrange it as you will, Mr.—Mr. Ussher," he answered; "I am quite indifferent. Naturally I shall remain with my sister-in-law until the unpleasant business is settled and shelved. But as I know nothing whatever of the affair, you will not want me. By the way, how about your prisoner, the man Hartigan—is he to be charged?"

Mr. Ussher's ruddy countenance grew a shade more crimson.

"I merely detained him a few hours," he responded, glancing down at his large and polished boot toe. "Mr. Jerome was quite right; a comparison of the marks on the pillow and Hartigan's finger tips was, in one respect, conclusive. It was not, at all events, Hartigan who actually committed the crime. Also, on inquiry at Hawthorn Cottage, I found corroboration of his assertion as to the cause for which he had purchased the chloroform."

"So," said the war-correspondent provokingly, "the poor fellow was allowed to slip through the meshes of your terrible net? Well, well, Ussher, I thought somehow you were on the wrong track. But there, to err is human."

The detective rubbed his chin with the back of a forefinger. "The coincidence was obviously a remarkable one, Mr. Jerome," he rejoined stiffly, "and it was my duty to follow the clue. It is only the amateur who starts with a theory, we professionals go over the ground bit by bit, and allow the facts to suggest their own explanation."

He turned to the elder man. "Perhaps, sir," he observed, "you would ascertain if Lady Tarleton has any objection to the inquest being held here and to-morrow. It is not strictly in my province, sir, but I fancy I can arrange for her ladyship's convenience to be consulted."

Edward Stormont moved from the neighbourhood of the justice-room and towards the great nail-studded hall doors of Groudle Tower.

"I will see if my sister-in-law has any views," he rejoined; "but I rather expect her wish will coincide with mine, to get the whole thing over as soon as possible."

He rang at the door as he spoke. It was opened by a male servant, who started at the sight of his master and the war-correspondent, hatless, and accompanied by the redoubtable Mr. Ussher.

"If you please, sir," he said, "a person is inquiring at the kitchen entrance for Mr. Ussher—a person of the name of John Davenal—brother of the—my lady's late maid, sir."

Mr. Ussher nodded. "With your permission, sir," he remarked, "I will go through and see him while you are consulting her ladyship."

"Certainly," began Edward Stormont, then stopped, Paul Jerome had touched his arm.

"I say, Stormont," murmured the war-correspondent in his friend's ear; "I'm beginning to be interested in this domestic tragedy of yours. I think I shall try to fathom it. Besides, I want to worry Ussher a bit. Let us suggest his having this fellow through, and see if we can pick up a thread or two of the mystery."

"By all means, if it interests you," said Edward Stormont, and added aloud. "Mr. Ussher, I think I should like to ask this man Davenal some questions. Suppose we have him in?"

Mr. Ussher sighed inaudibly, and shot a rebellious glance at the war-correspondent. "As you please, sir," he answered.

Edward Stormont gave an order, and the three men waited. A moment later, and then a burly, powerful form passed into the hall from the servants' quarters beyond. The diver walked with a stick, slowly, almost unsteadily. His face was pale, his expression heavy and spiritless. His eyes wandered from one to another of the trio who stood in the hall. Mr. Ussher stepped forward.

"You wished to see me, I believe, Mr. Davenal," he said. "I called at your cottage yesterday, and again at night, but you were in bed, I believe, indisposed."

John Davenal bent his head. "I was," he replied; "I heard the news of my—my poor sister's death"—rather abruptly—"after a long spell of work under the water; I am a diver, as you may know. It gave me a queer kind of heart shock, the doctor says."

He drew himself up, standing with a hand on his stick.

"You are Mr. Ussher, I reckon," he continued; "and a detective."

Mr. Ussher assented. John Davenal put a finger and thumb into a vest pocket, and pulled out a small, two-ounce bottle. It was partly filled with a colourless fluid, and bore a red poison label.

"There's the chloroform bottle you were asking about," he proceeded, in the same brusque fashion, "I had laid it by myself, after Dennis had used it for my ear, it being dangerous stuff. Moira said you had been rare and set on her finding it. And now you have it I shall be glad to learn why you wanted it, and why you came troubling my Moira with so many questions. There's something I hear in Groudle about Hannah having been chloroformed to death. Surely, surely you can't think——"

The detective had taken the small phial, uncorked it, and sniffed at it.

"I'm obliged to you, Mr. Davenal," he said, interrupting the diver, and returning him the bottle, "but it's of no importance. No charge whatever is being made against your brother-in-law in connection with his wife's death."

John Davenal recoiled. "Dennis!" he cried, "his wife—then you know he was her husband?"

Mr. Ussher got out his note-book. "We do," he rejoined, "will you be good enough to tell me when she was married, and why she lived apart from Mr. Hartigan?"

The diver hesitated. "I don't understand how it's come out," he said; "nor what it—it can have to do with her

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death, but she was married to Dennis going on for twenty odd years ago. He was a wild sort, and she found it out and decided to stay on in service. They had been married before he went away on a voyage, and were intending to settle down when he got back. But meantime she learnt too much about him, and they never did settle down."

A hand was laid on his arm and a chair was set behind him. Paul Jerome had moved it considerately from its place against the wall.

"Sit down, Mr. Davenal," he suggested kindly, "you are not yet, I fear, quite as completely recovered as you think."

The diver sank into the chair and looked up at the shrewd, pleasant visage of the war-correspondent.

"Thank you, sir," he said huskily. Paul Jerome stepped back to Edward Stormont's side and they continued their silent study of the colloquy. Mr. Ussher had been making a series of memoranda.

"Any children of the marriage?" he queried. John Davenal answered with a scarcely perceptible pause.

"No," he said; "none." The detective added a fresh memorandum to his previous ones.

"When did you last see your sister—alive?" he asked. The diver folded his arms upon his stick.

"Two days ago," he replied; "she came to Groudle Quay to see me."

"Were you in the habit of seeing her often?" pursued Mr. Ussher.

"No," said John Davenal, "it was the first time in—in many years. Though she wrote—at times."

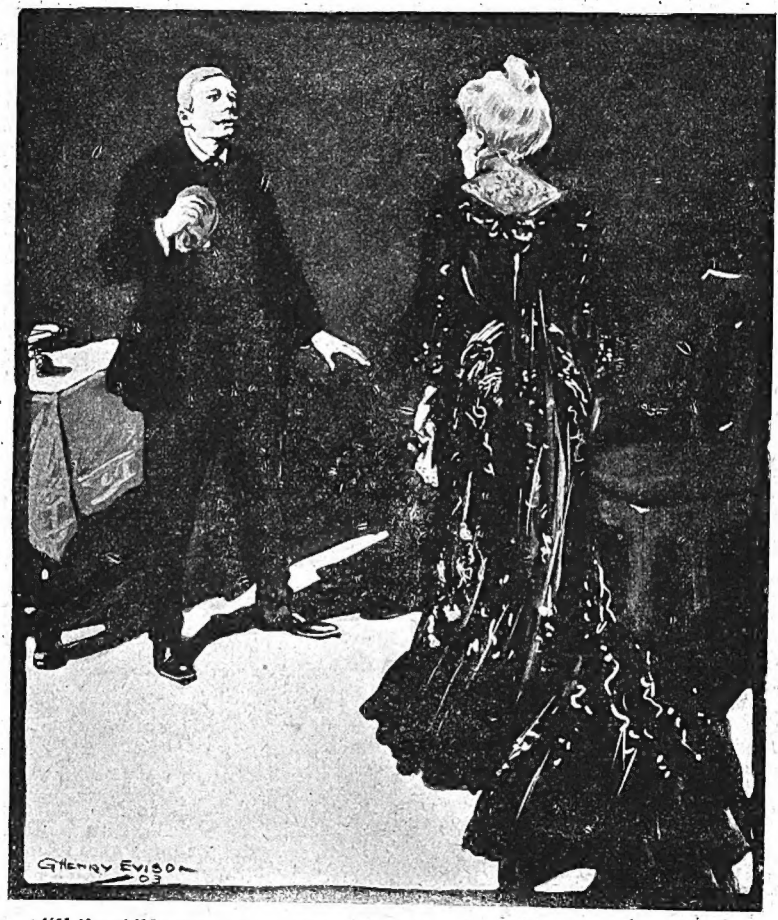
Edward Stormont intervened. "Mr. Davenal," he remarked, "you seem to have been acquainted with her private affairs—this marriage, for instance. Can you suggest anything that might lead some person to desire her death?"

"I cannot, sir," said the diver; "it is a mystery to me. But then I had known nothing of her and her doings for—for more years than I can count on my fingers."

Mr. Ussher closed his note-book. "Well, Mr. Stormont," he observed, "I will not trouble Mr. Davenal any further. If you have any additional questions to put——"

Edward Stormont shook his head, but Paul Jerome struck in quickly.

"This visit of your sister to you, Mr. Davenal," he said; "it was the first in many years. May we ask the reason of what must have been to you a highly unexpected visit?"




"If the child were no longer in my path," she murmured, "I would give ten thousand pounds—to the man who told me so!"

The diver sat motionless. "It—it had to do with the family affairs," he answered sternly—"old family matters, dead and buried long ago, except between her and I. I cannot speak more of them, sir, than that."

Paul Jerome bent a keen glance upon him. "It could have, of course, nothing to do with her painfully sudden death?" he said.

"No, sir," responded the diver deliberately. He sat and waited, and then, as no one put a question, he rose.

"I suppose," he added, "now that her marriage is known about, that you will look to Dennis to bury her. If—if he's not able, I will. You will let me know, I hope, when the law is satisfied, and she can be taken away."

Edward Stormont answered gently. "It shall be done," he promised.

"Thank you sir," murmured John Davenal, and moved to leave the hall, by the rear exit. Edward Stormont signed to a footman and the hall-doors were thrown open. John Davenal turned towards them, and, walking slowly, passed out of Groudle Tower.

In the same halting, uneven fashion, he retraced the route to the little seaport below, and gained the entrance to his little cottage. He raised the latch and stepped into the tiny square lobby, or ante-room, that lay beyond. The door into the kitchen was half open and voices came to him. Both were familiar. One was that of Moira, one that of Sir Guy Vanbrugh.

The diver made a motion as if to enter the room when a word, more clearly uttered than before, arrested him. The word was spoken tenderly, yet in firm, masculine tones, and it was the single sacred syllable "wife"!

"Say you will let me hope, Moira," Guy Vanbrugh was pleading; "say that you have missed my daily visit one tithe as much as I have missed my daily glimpse of your sweet face, and I will be patient, if you keep me in suspense a whole year. Can you not hold me out a little hope, dear, it is not such a terrifying word, is it—my 'wife'!"

John Davenal held his breath, yet his big frame was trembling in a pitiable excitement.

A soft murmur—the sigh of a woman's heart surrendering to its own weakness—reached his ear, and he heard Moira's voice. But he had never heard so sweet and childish a thrill in it.

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"Oh, Sir Guy," she said, and her voice was muffled suddenly as though she had sunk upon her lover's breast, "I think I have loved you all the time."

The diver drew himself up, and his face distorted as if he were in agony. A moan broke from him.

"Him, him!" he whispered. "Sir Guy loves her—and she—she loves him. I have lost her; lost her after all!"

## NINTH CHAPTER.

### Two Meetings and a Crossing.

"Indeed, Miss Irene, and we're rare glad to see you at Groudle Tower again, though it's a sad reason that keeps my lady here and brings you to her instead of her to you. But you're looking both well and bonny, for all London is such an unhealthy place."

The speaker was a fresh-coloured, North-country woman, whose smooth and snowy tresses, showing beneath her white lace cap and black ribbons, betrayed that she was far advanced in years. Yet the figure in the plain, dark dress was upright and sprightly. Irene Tarleton had taken her withered hands impulsively.

"Yes," she said, "isn't it horrible about poor Davenal? If it wasn't for that I'd be charmed to be back in Cumberland, dear Mrs. Lintot. I do manage to keep fit in London, somehow, but it's a hard task. Give me a wet morning on the breakwater, with the wind blowing half a gale off Groudle Head, and you can take all the Rows and Bond Streets in the world. But I must go and pay my respects to the *mater*—you and I will have a long gossip later on."

She crossed the gloomy hall—at whose wide entrance the servants were bringing in her bicycle and travelling-bags. As she neared the foot of the great staircase, someone flashed down it, someone clad in a tweed riding suit, and carrying a light, silver-mounted switch. Irene gasped and coloured up to her eyebrows.

"Mr. Jerome!" she exclaimed, "is it you—or your ghost? And if you are real, how on earth did you get here?"

The war-correspondent laughed, and took the gloved hand held out to him.

"I came from Copenhagen with Mr. Stormont," he said. "We met at Petersburg—I on my way from the Turkish frontier, he from Thibet. We went on to Copenhagen with a Danish friend, and then made for Hull. Our visit to Groudle was due to a whim of Stormont's. So now you have it all in a mouthful."

He was still holding her hand—she released it gently, stealing a shy, feminine glance at his tanned features.

"So you have been making yourself famous," she observed.

"Thank you for the papers you had sent me, but I always bought the *Gazette*, and felt quite proud to think you were a friend of mine."

Paul Jerome fingered his riding-switch. "I—I thought about you often when I was writing for the *Gazette*," he said; "pictured you drinking tea in Bond Street or waltzing at Lady Somebody's and all that sort of thing. I liked to believe you'd be sorry if I went under, and so I—I didn't."

Irene smiled. "Then I'm glad you believed it," she retorted and coloured again. The war-correspondent stepped aside.

"What a clumsy beggar I am," he said, "here I'm yarning on when you've only just arrived, and are no doubt tired and hungry. Well, I will possess my soul in patience till we meet again."

He stood to watch her as she ran upstairs. The shy, girlish smile lingered about Irene's lips as she went to her mother's room, and her eyes were both soft and bright. And she was singing a snatch of song that Mr. Paul Jerome would have given a good deal to hear.

"*The pibroch is sounding, o'er valley and scaur,*
*'Tis Allen, my own, coming home from the war.*"

She blushed at the second line, and only hummed the last two-thirds of it.

Lady Tarleton encountered her on the threshold. "Oh," she observed petulantly, "so you've got here at last. If you're hungry, you'd better tell Lintot to give you a little cold chicken and a cup of chocolate; we have lunched."

She swept by her daughter and vanished down the stairs. At its foot she paused and motioned to a footman.

"Where is this person?" she asked.

"In the small drawing-room, my lady," responded the servant and went to a door hard by. He threw it open and Lady Tarleton entered. At her appearance a lounging figure rose from a chair. It was Dennis Hartigan.

Lady Tarleton waited till the door had reclosed. Dennis Hartigan waited also. Yet the eyes of each were studying the other.

The woman was the first to speak. "Well," she said, "I expected this visit when I heard that you had been released. Let me spare you the clumsy diplomacy of your class. Blackmail is written in your face. I have read the word too often in your wife's not to know it by now."

Dennis Hartigan raised his brows. The decision of her attack had disconcerted him, as it was meant to.

"I am not a rich woman," went on Lady Tarleton. "Though I am, of course, the heir to the estate, my brother-in-law has an exclusive life interest. My husband left me a beggar. You cannot get out of me what I have not got."

The other grinned. "That is just what I can do, my lady," he said, lowering his voice, and coming close to her. "You haven't got these estates and the fortune that goes with them. But though you haven't got them I can take them off you. Mr. Stormont's heir is not you, my lady. One lives that can take the property from you, and, at her majority, from him—his daughter."

Lady Tarleton gazed at the speaker, and a spasm passed over her worn, selfish countenance—a spasm that might have been either hate or alarm.

"I must try to borrow," she answered coldly. "If you can tell me the child's whereabouts, you shall have, by hook or by crook, a thousand pounds."

Dennis Hartigan shook his head. "You offered Hannah five," he said. "I must have five at least. But what good will her name and whereabouts do you? You don't suppose I should let you put her out of the way, do you, and rob me of my trump card?"

Lady Tarleton hesitated.

"If—if the child were no longer in my path," she murmured, "I would give, not five, but ten thousand pounds—to the man who told me so."

The steward started. Lady Tarleton played with the rings on her fingers.

"Does anyone but you know of the—the proceedings that followed the child's supposed death?" she asked.

"N—no," said Dennis Hartigan, "that is, no my lady, no one."

Lady Tarleton took out her purse and gave him a note for a hundred pounds. "If I judge you rightly, Mr. Hartigan, she remarked, "you are a bold, a ruthless, and a discreet man. Go away and think over what I have said to you."

She snapped the clasp of her purse and turned away.

"Think it well over," she said, glancing back at him as she reached out a hand to the bell. Dennis Hartigan folded up the note.

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"I—I will, my lady," he answered, "and thank your ladyship."

He moved towards the opening door and passed out. From the threshold he looked round reflectively. Lady Tarleton met the look with cold directness.

Reaching the high road he turned along it in the direction of Groudle, past the 'Half Brick.' Between that point and Groudle Town, he became aware of an approaching figure, slight, girlish, and moving with a curious caution along the edge of the kerb. He saw that she was blind before he had recognised her as his sister, Kit.

He muttered an expletive under his breath as he went to meet her. His step attracted her attention and she stopped, listening. Then she laughed happily.

"It's you, Dennis, I know your walk. For shame, you selfish fellow, where have you been all this time? Thinking of anything but your poor little sister, I'll be bound! Well, I was just coming up to the 'Half Brick' to ask about you, for all the world as if I were your wife."

"And if you were," grumbled her brother wrathfully, "I'd break every bone in your body, to teach you better manners!"

"No, you wouldn't," Kit said, "for if I were your wife I should know how to coax you. There, I forgive you, Dennis, dear, but I have wanted you really. Moira says I do nothing but sing—

*"Give my love to Nancy, the girl that I adore,*
*Tell her that she'll never see her sailor any more."*

"Stow that!" cried the ex-steward, for she had broken into an imitation of his own drunken accents. "Come on, I was just going down to the cottage, let's go together."

Kit put her arm in his, and they passed on side by side.

"Do you know, Dennis, dear," she remarked, "I was dreaming about you last night. Oh, such a queer dream."

"Was it?" said her brother, morosely.

"Yes," continued the blind girl. "I dreamt I was down on the old breakwater, sitting on the steps as I used to. And I dreamt I heard someone come along the breakwater—someone singing 'Give my love to Nancy,' and I got up and ran up the steps. And as soon as I reached the top I recognised the walk. It was you, Dennis, and I said, 'Oh, then it was you all the time!' Wasn't that a silly dream?"

The ex-steward showed his teeth in a silent snarl. "Yes," he answered, "a foolish dream enough."

Kit laughed. "I asked Moira this morning," she added, "if she had ever heard that song about Nancy. She said, 'No.' And Mr. Davenal hadn't either."

Dennis Hartigan's eyes flashed. They had come to a winding, sequestered lane that crossed their road. He turned down it—it had high, over-grown banks and deep, brim-full ditches. Dennis Hartigan looked before and behind him with a singular anxiety.

"No, not that way," said the blind girl, "that's the level crossing, Dennis, and I hate the trains."

An expression of grim intelligence flickered over the other's features. "Oh, nonsense," he said, "I'm with you!" And he drew her forward along the lane.

From the first bend in the narrow thoroughfare he could see the level crossing. And the great central gates were shut. The ex-steward's glance went to the distance signals of the neighbouring station. They were down, a train was almost due. He led the blind girl onward, and piloted her through the the small side-gate. Already his ear had caught the rumble of the approaching train. He passed on to the level crossing, leading the blind girl.

The shriek of a whistle sounded, and the funnel and buffers of a locomotive showed round the distant bend.

Dennis Hartigan loosed his hold of his sister's arm, and sprang over the wooden flooring of the crossing. "Stand there," he said, "you are quite safe."

The blind girl, left standing alone between the metals, extended her hands gropingly; the ground was shaken by the tremendous vibrations of the oncoming express.

(*Another instalment next week.*)

# *Your Editor Chats.*

An announcement of the new competition which will start next week appears on page 367. If you carefully read all the particulars you will see what a simple and pleasant occupation it will afford for the long, dull evenings. The prizes, too, are well worth winning. The Index to Stations in Bradshaw's Guide, in which all the correct solutions are to be found, is the one which competitors in the *Pearson's Weekly* £5 a Week for Life Competition are using, so, if you are going in for that, there will be no need for you to purchase a new index. To prevent disappointment you should at once order a copy of next Tuesday's *Short Stories*—it is dated March 28th—to be reserved for you; there is sure to be a big demand for that number. If you have not already got an Index to Stations, it will be as well to send for one *now*, so as to be able to start the competition without any delay.

In addition to the valuable money prizes offered in the new competition, we are giving away twenty-five of our plendid Gramophones. A large number of these have been awarded already in various competitions, and all the lucky recipients have expressed their very great delight at getting such handsome presents. There may still be a few persons who do not know what a Gramophone is, and perhaps think that it is an intricate machine which requires very careful handling, if it is not soon to get out of order. Such, however, is not the case. The Gramophones which we are giving away are very simple in construction, and they reproduce perfectly whatever is on the records, whether it be a song, recitation, or instrumental music. All you have to do is to place the record in position, and then set the machine in motion. It will continue to reproduce the sounds as long as you wish it to do so. Each instrument is accompanied by two records and is fitted with a concert sound-box, which greatly increases the volume of sound.

The last of the series of articles by Lady Peggy Carstairs on "How I Chaperoned Belinda" appears on page 375 and the four succeeding pages. I am sure that all my readers will be sorry that they have come to an end—I myself most certainly am.

"The Confessions of a Self-Made Girl," on pages 368-372, are well worth perusal, and I would recommend my readers—especially the members of the fair sex who have to earn their own living, and are hoping to make a name in the world—to read them carefully, and endeavour to profit by the experiences through which Maud Cardew passed before she attained her present position.

I have been glad to receive a large number of favourable criticisms of the new serial story, "Held Apart," and strongly recommend those who have not yet started to read it to do so at once.

In a few weeks' time I shall publish reproductions of a number of heads of men of various nationalities. They have taken a considerable time to get together owing to the difficulty of obtaining the correct national costume, and even now the number is not quite so complete as I could wish, but I think I have managed to find the most picturesque ones.

**Your Editor.**

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**The Story of a - - Masterful Woman.**

Miss Elizabeth Morant was impatient; that was rendered perfectly clear by the contraction of the brows and the firmly-closed lips, and it was further indicated by the quick, intermittent tapping of the fingers on the little rosewood table.

Her dress and surroundings denoted ample means, while the strong, imperious face bore proof of the exceptional character of the woman. People who knew her said that, given the regal power, she might have become a modern Queen Elizabeth, for she was a woman born to command.

She had reached the age of thirty without marrying—not very surprising, remarked the gossips with a smile. The number of men who could love such a woman was small; some might have married her for money, being satisfied to play second fiddle in order to better their social position, but she had not encouraged any advances so far.

It was an open secret that she had come into her wealth unexpectedly; an elderly great-uncle had died intestate and she was the only relative; she had not even known of his existence and the inheritance was a great surprise for her, but she entered into her new life with the utmost composure.

She appeared quite unmoved by the sudden change from genteel poverty and drudgery to affluence and ease, a fact which testified to her almost unwomanly strength of mind.

Of her career prior to her elevation to fortune, her few friends had learnt nothing; she told them nothing about it and she ignored all "leading" questions and broad hints. They felt that there was something in it that would have interested them, but their curiosity was not satisfied.

The contracted brows were drawn still closer to the half-closed eyes and the tapping became more impatient. At that moment the timepiece chimed three o'clock, ending with three musical notes to indicate the hour, and Miss Morant's brow cleared as she uttered a low laugh.

"How foolish of me!" she exclaimed. "I remember now! I said a quarter-past three, not a quarter to three. Of course, I altered *to* into *past!* I was afraid that he was behind the appointed time, which would have been an indication that he was not much disposed to—to be my tool!" she concluded with a quiet significance that was calculated to produce an uncanny feeling in the person who heard it had there been any one present to hear it.

She rose and went to a larger table, from the drawer of which she took a thin packet. It contained two photographs.

"The dead love and the living!" she murmured. A softened expression crept over the imperious features, effecting a great change in the woman. "Perhaps I ought not to call Ralph Seton my dead love," she continued reflectively. "He is dead, but I still have a place for him in my heart, and I am proving it by remaining true to the vow I made to repay him who made Ralph suffer, flee and die of malaria in a foreign land before I could scrape together the money to follow him.

"And you"—addressing the other portrait—"I love you now, and I know that Ralph would approve, for you are bold and determined, as he was and as I am. Yes, I love you, I love you!"

She raised the senseless card to her lips and kissed it in the way that one would expect such a woman to do it, passionately, as though her whole being were condensed into that kiss. As she took the card from her lips a maid entered with a message. The girl stopped in confusion, but Miss Morant remained unabashed and haughty.

"Yes, show Mr. Poole in here!" she commanded.

She replaced the packet in the drawer and seated herself to receive the expected caller. Mr. Poole was a man of medium height, clean-shaven, alert; his eyes were of extraordinary keenness, which he tried to repress. He took in the general aspect of the room and its contents in one swift glance, and stepped towards the chair to which Miss Morant motioned him.

"Well?" she inquired.

"I'll do it!" replied Mr. Poole, with just a trace of hesitation. "Business in the private inquiry line is bad and——"

"The Maxham case did not help you much?" she queried, with the faintest of smiles.

"No!" admitted Mr. Poole with a flush. "That was a bit awkward, but I did nothing shady. Over zealous, that was it. Served my client too well! But this job of yours—you see, it might be necessary to trump up something. I think it's worth more than you offer!"

"I'll add £250!"

"Then it's a bargain!" said Poole. "It won't be my fault if it doesn't come off. Give me the full particulars."

"Here they are!" returned Miss Morant with her usual calmness. "Ralph Seton and I were engaged. He was employed in the firm of Masters & Co. One day it was discovered that someone had been embezzling some money—a large sum. Ralph was suspected, and, to avoid prison, he fled.

"He hoped to get away till the hue and cry had subsided and then return and work quietly till he had gathered the evidence necessary to clear himself. He died of malaria in South America. I hadn't enough money to go out to him. I have visited his grave since then and have vowed to repay the debt incurred by the one who accused Ralph."

"It's revenge, that's what it comes to when you put it in plain language!" said Poole bluntly.

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Miss Morant winced and frowned; she always spoke out unequivocally herself, but she resented this bluntness on the part of another.

"Call it what you like; I call it justice!" she answered frigidly. "Now you know what to do. I have given you the name of the firm and of the accused man, the unjustly accused man. It occurred nearly seven years ago, and I have been hoping to—to avenge Ralph myself. I use your own word, for avenging is to have revenge! I have not done it; the task is not one for a woman unaided. I want you to do it."

"You want to ruin the man who accused Ralph Seton, if I can find him! And if Ralph Seton was guilty, really?"

Poole was amazed at the effect of his words. Miss Morant's eyes seemed to flash fire, she sprang from her seat and stood before him with clenched hands.

"He was innocent to me, and I care not what the world thinks! He was taken from me, our happiness was wrecked, and it is but justice that the life of the one who brought this upon us should receive the same fate. Your instructions are to ruin the man who ruined our lives; do the work and receive the pay!"

Poole left the presence of Miss Morant about ten minutes later with £250 in gold in his pockets, the first instalment of his pay. He was hard up and this liberal treatment, before he had done a stroke, won him over.

"She will part with even more than she said if I work the thing all right!" he muttered. "I don't want all this heavy stuff about me though; I'd sooner have paper. I shan't bank it; that might lead to something against me later on.

"She's artful! No cheque, no paper, but gold, so that there's no tracing it back to her! I'll bet that she has collected this money now and then, so as not to draw on a big cheque!" He meditated further. "Can't understand a woman like that being capable of the tender passion that love is supposed to be! Still, love works wonders."

Mr. Poole would have seen the confirmation of his concluding remark had he been present at the Tristam ball that evening.

Miss Elizabeth Morant, attired in a manner that became her to perfection, was attracting general attention and a certain amount of envious admiration. Was she not beautiful and was she not receiving marked attention from Lord Alminton?

Younger ladies saw with sorrow their chance of capturing this eligible young man vanishing before their eyes. There had been some gossip about these two; rumour had said that Lord Alminton had paid Miss Morant much attention during a stay in Nice, but the matter had not been taken seriously.

A particularly delightful waltz had just terminated and Lord Alminton was escorting Miss Morant to a seat. The dreamy music and the enjoyment of the dance had exhilarated both; he was flushed and entranced, while her face wore an expression that no one had seen on it before. It resembled the look that overspread her countenance when gazing at the portraits, but nobody in the ball-room had seen that.

"Miss Morant, may I take you to a seat and get you an ice or—or will you walk with me through the gallery? This is the interval, and—it would give me great pleasure to spend a few minutes with you apart from the crowd!"

It was curious that each should lose some of his or her individuality when with the other. He was not usually so hesitating, and she almost blushed at her action in securing his portrait unknown to him. It was so unlike her to feel abashed!

"I prefer a walk along the gallery," she said, not daring to look up.

His heart gave a great bound. He conducted her to a quiet corner and, forgetful of the supposed desire to walk through the gallery they sat down.

"Miss Morant, I have been waiting for this opportunity ever since we met in Paris. I have tried to get near to you, I have haunted the places where I expected to find you. I have been tormented when I saw you surrounded by others or when I could not find you, and I have been transported with joy when I could get near you for a moment

"I was determined to bring matters to a climax to-night, Elizabeth"—taking her hand in his—"it may be presumption but I must tell you to-night that I love you! I must learn my fate. Dare I hope that I am not to go from here with the sadness of disappointment—dare I hope that my love is returned, even in some slight measure?"

She kept her eyes lowered for a moment; she could not look at him till she had controlled her emotion; she must not betray the depth of her passion immediately. With an effort she repressed the feeling which she knew was gleaming in her eyes; then she looked up at him, with something like composure and replied softly: "You may hope!"

"Elizabeth! Those words bring happiness to me!" With a swift movement he bent forward and kissed her. The kiss was returned with a warmth that sent him into the seventh heaven of a lover's paradise. He would have repeated the caress, but another couple came into view.

"Why did you say that you must learn your fate to-night, Robin?" she asked as they went back to the ball-room, the happiest of mortals. "You seemed to lay special stress on the word."

"Ah! The remembrance makes me unhappy, for it brings me back to earth!" he cried. "I must be off to-morrow on business, and it will be a month before I return—I am going to Egypt. But the time will pass, and when I come back, our engagement shall be announced!"

The idea of parting so soon was not pleasant, but Elizabeth was strong-minded enough to make the best of it and be happy. She was simply brilliant during the rest of the evening, eclipsing all the members of her sex and enchanting all the members of the opposite sex.

He had told her to call him by his family pet name of "Robin," and she had not thought to ask him for any other. Letters could be addressed with his title, and she could wait to learn the other; she might find out from a book of reference, but she would not buy or borrow one, or seek the information through a third party. "He will tell me, and it matters nothing!" she declared, with a mixture of loving confidence and queenly dignity that befitted her. So she waited.

Mr. Poole called a week later, and he found Miss Morant as hard and haughty as on the previous occasion.

"Yes, I'm on the track, well on it!" he replied, in answer to her question. "I've got my hand on the man who shouted the whole thing from the housetops, so to say."

"Well?" said Miss Morant, in a tone of sarcastic inquiry. "You know what to do, I think? Why trouble me? Your money is safe when you have finished! Or do you want some more on account?"

"I'll take it, although that is not what I came about!" retorted Poole, with a slight flush. "I've come to ask if I shall go on, because I've heard a rumour—about you—and I thought it would—might, I mean—alter your plans!"

Mr. Poole was not easily embarrassed, but this woman was so different from others. If she had been a man, she would have been one of those who rule an Empire or a Government, dragging subjects or colleagues wherever she pleased. Miss Morant wa-

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nettled that this fellow should mention that he had heard her name coupled with that of Lord Alminton, and she crushed him.

"Never mind what you have heard! I have not engaged you to play the spy on myself!" she said icily. "Devote your attention to the work for which I am paying you!"

There was a sting in that little speech that pierced its way deep into the sensitive portion of Mr. Poole's anatomy, and he shut his teeth hard as he rose to go.

"Then Basil Westerham is to be made to go through it, that's the programme?" he said rather insolently. "Very good! I have my finger on the whole thing, and I can make the transaction look shady for him by just a little juggling with this or that, I fancy.

"Most people believe that the other fellow was guilty, but it is a bit involved, and it's a toss up whether he wouldn't have cleared himself, or got off for want of absolute clear proof, if he hadn't scooted! I suppose you are playing your own little game, and if you don't like to let me into the know, I can do without it! Yes, I'd like another instalment, a good one!"

Another payment was made, again in gold.

"She's a demon!" mused Mr. Poole, as he went homewards. "I must get some more out of her in a week, so that I'm pretty safe if the thing doesn't succeed! It'll make a stir, and he may have a tough job to clear himself, but I'm inclined to think that it isn't possible to push it so far as she wants. But I'm not going to concern myself about her; she is pretty artful in keeping clear, and I must be the same. That last move of hers is smart, if it's true!"

Mr. Poole kept his word, and demanded another instalment of his pay at the end of seven days. Then he set to work, and Miss Morant followed his request to watch the newspapers for news of Basil Westerham.

Miss Morant began to grow impatient as the days passed without news. Lord Alminton was expected back, and would arrive in Southampton on the 27th, and she hungered for her triumph of revenge before she enjoyed the triumph of love.

Occasionally she felt uneasy, a strange sentiment for her; if Lord Alminton should know of her action in crushing Basil Westerham and avenging Ralph Seton, would he approve? He might, for he was a strong man, and he was the soul of honour, and if Ralph had really been guilty? She laughed mirthlessly; could it be that she was becoming a prey to remorse?

She had believed that Ralph Seton was innocent. Stay! Had she believed it or had she been blinded by the love of a strong woman, as she was? Had she blindly followed the rage which the destruction of her happiness had aroused in her?

"A good lover can be a good hater," says the old saw; this is true from the very fact that anyone who is capable of deep feeling must have intense sentiments of all kinds, good or bad.

Elizabeth Morant had allowed this intensity of feeling to have full play, and she had hated the man who had brought the embezzlement to light, hated him with an intensity that would not allow her to think of anything else than the fact that he had ruined her happiness.

She tried to shut out the disturbing thoughts, but they forced themselves upon her, day by day, till she grew nervous. Her old calmness was deserting her. She thought of sending for Poole, and telling him to desist, but this was such a turnabout that she could not at first reconcile conflicting feelings.

At length she resolved to undo all that she had done. "I have the prospect of being happier than I dreamt of!" she said. "I must not endanger that happiness! I will let the other pass!" So she sent for Poole.

He was gone and his office closed! That accounted for the absence of news! Miss Morant hardly knew whether to be angry or pleased, but Lord Alminton was to arrive that day and he would visit her in the evening.

She waited for him, but he came not. Perhaps the vessel had been delayed; he would come on the morrow. She passed a restless night, full of foreboding, and read the confirmation of that presentiment of evil as soon as she opened her newspaper on the following morning.

A most sensational affair, the newspapers called it. Young Lord Alminton, on arriving at Southampton late in the evening, the vessel having been delayed by stress of weather in the Bay of Biscay, had been charged with being concerned in the embezzlement of a sum of money from Messrs. Masters and Co.

The actual theft had been committed years ago, when Lord Alminton, then Basil Westerham, a clerk with small prospects, had brought the charge of embezzlement against Ralph Seton, a fellow clerk. Seton was believed to be guilty, and he confirmed this opinion by fleeing the country.

Lately, however, a younger member of the firm had been going over the old papers at the instigation of one of his staff, and had, it was alleged, found evidence enough to support a charge of complicity, if not one of embezzlement itself.

Basil Westerham was well connected, but did not dream of succeeding to the title; fate had removed those who had stood nearer to it, and he had suddenly found himself heir. He adopted the family name of the Alminton, calling himself Basil Casselton, and had finally succeeded to the title. There was a rumour that further revelations were to be expected.

Elizabeth Morant knew very little of what passed that day. A telegram arrived from "Robin" after midday, saying that he would be with her in the evening. She waited for him with a dull sense of annihilation. He was coming to her, liberated on bail, and suffering under the charge which she had brought upon him! Now she understood what Poole had begun to tell her! Oh, why had she been so haughty, so vindictive! Had she been less imperious, she might have averted the consequences of her acts!

He came, and she retreated from him.

"My darling!" he cried in anguish. "Surely *you* do not think me capable of such a vile thing!"

He had misinterpreted her movement. No! She could not believe him capable of it! Yet—was Ralph really guilty? She was torn by opposing sentiments, but the sight of Robin's face threw the weight of conviction into the scale that stood for him.

"I shrink from you because I am unworthy of you, Robin!" she cried, calling him by the name that had become so dear to her. "It is not you who are guilty; it is I. I have brought this upon you!"

"You!" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes! I will tell you!" She cast aside all reserve; standing erect and scorning to spare herself one iota of the shame, she confessed what she had done—confessed it humbly and fully.

"I will make it all plain and clear you!" she cried, when she had finished the wretched confession. "Then I will go from you to prison, if it be my lot. All I ask is—do not despise me too much, for I love you, and your condemnation of me will be the bitterest part of my punishment!"

"It is dreadful, and it might have been impossible to undo all this wrong! No, I will not blame you more!" he said, as she cowered before him. "Your punishment is great."

"And you share it! I have brought it upon you!" she wailed. "My wickedness has recoiled upon me, but you suffer as well. I cannot bear it!"

"The happiness of the past month will help me to bear the pain of separation," he said sadly. "I forgive you!"

She glanced at him with yearning, her eyes lighted by a resolve that had just sprung up within her.

"We must part, but before you go, grant me one favour!" she pleaded.

He seemed to divine her wish. Their lips touched, and she kissed him with passionate fervour, as she had kissed his portrait. Then she saw him go, slowly, reluctantly.

Lord Alminton was cleared of the charge, but no scandal resulted. To the public, it was treated as a grave mistake, and in private the wrongdoers were let off lightly at Lord Alminton's request, whereby he saved the woman he loved. She lives quietly in a little village now, and once a year she receives a specially printed card with good wishes, over which she always weeps.

**George Day.**

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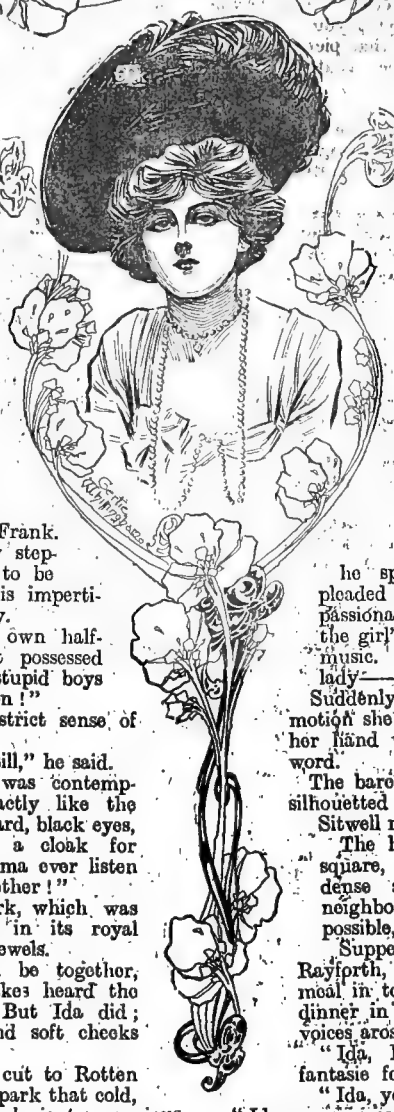
# AN ATTEMPTED ELOPEMENT.



## Telling of One which had a Happy Ending.

*"We hadn't much money, but weddings are cheap,*
*So, while the old fellow was snoring asleep,*
*With a lad and a ladder she managed to creep*
*Over the garden wall!"*

"Don't endure it, Ida, darling!" cried Frank.

"I won't!" cried Ida. She swallowed hard, and looked very determined. She was always brave when she was with Frank. "If I hadn't money do you suppose my step-father would want to keep me? I have to be governess and nurse-maid in chief for his impertinent children five hours out of every day.

"I wouldn't mind if they were my own half-brothers and sisters. I don't see what possessed mamma to marry a man who had two stupid boys and three cross girls for her to wait upon!"

Frank Keith prided himself upon his strict sense of justice.

"Jasper Rayforth is a handsome man still," he said.

"Handsome!" Ida Sitwell's voice was contemptuous. "He looks like a brigand! Exactly like the brigand of a story-book—black, pointed beard, black eyes, sham courtesy, and deference that is a cloak for scheming insolence. Oh, why did mamma ever listen to him? She and I were so happy together!"

They were walking through Hyde Park, which was overwhelmingly majestic and beautiful in its royal ermine and innumerable glittering frost jewels.

"Not so happy as you and I shall be together, Ida, if only——" Not even the snowflakes heard the remainder of the softly-spoken words. But Ida did; Ida, listening with bright head bent and soft cheeks flushing.

Many walking briskly across the short cut to Rotten Row—there were no saunterers in the park that cold, bracing, midwinter day—looked with eyes lenient or envious at the two who seemed so completely oblivious of all save each other.

He, tall and vigorous, straight-striding, and manly—she, fair and girlish and fur-clad as a princess of the Russias.

"Oh, I—I couldn't, Frank! I wouldn't dare to!"

"I suppose I'm a fool to hope you would!" he returned bitterly. "Your people would put me down for a fortune-hunter; but even if I should not succeed in my profession—I've got enough to take good care of you, and——"

Ida drew a quick little breath and turned suddenly.

"Now—Frank! Don't be unjust! I haven't any people—as you say. Only a person. That's my mother. And I haven't all of her since she married Rayforth. And if I knew you could give me only a third-storey flat and two pairs of gloves a year I'd marry you just the same, because——"

"My dear little love!" he murmured. "I can't bear to see you unhappy there, Ida—and Heaven knows I'm not half the fellow I might be if I had you beside me! Your mother——"

"Oh, my mother," said the girl, with a piteous touch of finality in her tone. "She is changed. She is no longer like a gay elder sister as she always was before her second marriage. She is controlled by that man. His influence dominates her. But still for her sake I would not like——"

"She loves you—desires your happiness?"

"Above all things."

"Then——" he began. And once more he spoke so low that only she heard. He pleaded well. He was no laggard in love. His passionate protestations reached the depths of the girl's soul and rang there like inspiriting music. "If brave heart were to win fair lady——"

Suddenly, with a little swift, impulsive, gracious motion she swayed slightly towards him, slipped her hand within his arm. And she said just one word.

The bare, black-limbed trees of the park were silhouetted against a sky of pallid gold when Ida Sitwell reached home.

The house of Jasper Rayforth was a grim, square, old-fashioned mansion set back among dense shrubbery, and having for its nearest neighbour another house equally grim, and, if possible, more quaint of outline and aspect.

Supper was on the table when the girl entered. Rayforth, having eaten a comfortable midday meal in town himself, frowned upon the idea of dinner in the evening. A shrill babel of young voices arose:

"Ida, I've got to have you play over that fantasie for me to-night!"

"Ida, you must help me with my German!"

"Ida, mamma says you'll trim my hat for me."

"What kept you so long, any way?"

The girl made no reply; no comment. She took her accustomed seat. The rose colour which the cold had brought to her cheeks did not fade; indeed, it deepened. But when her mother spoke to her in a low voice she listened attentively, replying with a quick, warm smile.

"That old chap next door is becoming more of a crank than ever," remarked Rayforth. "I met him to-day and he looked at me as though I were an utter stranger."

"He is always very polite to me," Mrs. Rayforth declared.

Ida laughed.

"Oh, that's because you admired the flowers he grew in the back garden last summer," she said.

When the tasks of the evening had been accomplished and Ida was alone in her own little room looking out on the garden which had been so gay a few months before she set deliberately to work.

First she put on her best dress. Then she packed her

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portmanteau. After that she got together in a handbag such necessaries, valuables, and papers, as were of especial worth to her. There was the writing of a note remaining.

The little blurred, loving letter written, she turned out the gas, softly opened the window, and, warmly wrapped up, sat down by the sill—listening, waiting.

The night air came to her crisp, sweet, invigorating. Stars twinkled down in quite a sociable and conniving fashion.

Even the man in the pearl-white moon that went sailing up into a sapphire vault, seemed to wink with friendly and comical appreciation of a romance the like of which he had aided or defeated many a time in his innumerable experiences as spy or conspirator.

"Hark!" Ida started up as a sound came to her. She leant forward. "Frank."

"Sh—h! Yes!"

A wavering black object slowly upreared itself, resting against the window-sill. Ida lifted her handbag out of the window, lowered it to the ground by the cord to which it was attached.

The next instant, trusting to the consideration of the moon which had momentarily disappeared, for all the world like an accommodating chaperon, she stepped out on the ladder, began her light, sure-footed, confident descent.

She was half way to the ground, to her lover, freedom, happiness, when the side door of the house next door was flung wide—a billow of light streamed forth.

"Hold on, there!" cried a cracked voice. "Oh, I say Rayforth—Rayforth!"

The next instant a gaunt old figure, attired in pyjamas, a flapping dressing gown, and a skull cap, came flying down the steps leading from his library, darted across the space intervening between the houses and pounded upon the nearest window of the house Ida had just quitted.

"Burglars!" they heard him quaver in shrill accents. "Burglars!"

Ida felt her courage oozing out at her finger tips.

"They will find us! He will make me go back! Oh, Frank!"

But Frank was not to be baulked of his bride. He seized the ladder, carried it a few feet, propped it against another window.

Already there was movement and clamour inside. Lights flashed up over the house. They could hear the excited tones of Rayforth as he sent someone for the police. Frank grabbed up Ida's bag—caught her by the hand. "Run!" he whispered, "we've got to rush for it!"

A swift dash, then they paused, dismayed. There was no scaling the high wooden fence at the rear. And in front the light from a gas lamp made the street as bright as day.

The open door to the left caught Keith's eye; to see was to act. A whispered word—a rapid scamper—and the two, panting, laughing, breathless, faced each other in the cosy den of the recluse neighbour of the Rayforths.

Even as they stood so, they heard sounds as if the police had arrived. Quick as thought Ida turned out the light. Unseen they peered out. They saw dancing lights, dark, moving forms, heard sharp inquiries.

A cordon of police surrounded the house. Sudden excitement stimulated the searchers. The ladder had been discovered! He of the skull cap was pipingly reiterating how he had seen the burglary attempted.

"They're in my house, too!" he shrieked suddenly. "The light has been put out!"

He made a dash across the snowy lawn. A couple of brawny policemen outstripped him. Ida and Keith fled towards the door opening into the hall, out in the darkness, came crash against a book-case. Lanterns flashed. Electricity flared up.

Keith, his arm flung round Ida, stood defiantly facing the burglar-hunters. At sight of the tenant of the house he gave a violent start. "Uncle Hugo!" he cried.

"Frank Keith!" The old man was smiling grimly. "I didn't think I was interrupting an elopement!"

Furious with rage Jasper Rayforth tore in. He was waving a letter wildly. His wife timidly followed.

"You must come back, Ida!" he shrieked. "You are under my control. You——"

"Don't get excited!" counselled Hugo Bertrand, gravely. His skull cap and wig set rakishly over one eye gave him a grotesque appearance, but he was quite serious.

"I knew my nephew here was in love with your pretty step-daughter. I knew also you would permit no suitor of hers to enter your house, so strong," smiling satirically—"was your desire to keep her. As he is my nearest relative, and will be my heir, I decided to find out for myself what kind of a girl she was, and so took this house near you."

He crossed the room and took a hand of Ida and of Frank.

"I've found out," he said. "She is sweet and good and patient. She watered my flowers when I was ill last summer—every evening! Oh, I knew! And if I had known that the ladder was lifted to-night that she might leave your house forever, Jasper Rayforth, I—I——" The old voice quivering—"I'd have held it—yes, sir!"

The police withdrew, Mrs. Rayforth, pleased and secretly rejoicing, kissed her daughter and Frank. Rayforth gasped out apologies to the eccentric old millionaire whom he would fain conciliate.

"We will have a grand wedding," began Bertrand, "and——"

"A wedding reception if you will," faltered Ida. "But—but Frank and I were married this afternoon!"

"What! You sly young rascals! Well, so much the better! And now you'll live with me; I'm all alone except for the servants. You'll be mistress here, and you'll brighten an old man's life—eh, little girl?"

For answer the bride lifted her pretty lips to the kind old face bent down to kiss hers.

**W. T. Miller.**

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# CONCERNING TUCKS.

## The Story of a Girl who Wasn't Allowed to "Grow Up."

"Netta, are you ever going to grow up?"

The question was asked in a bantering tone, but the eyes of the man who asked it were serious and searching. They were met by one swift, questioning glance in return.

"I am thinking of letting out a few tucks for my birthday," Netta said, with an exaggerated sigh and surveying the pair of slender black legs swinging from the low bough of the apple-tree upon which she was perched.

"Oh! So tucks do it, do they?" Harold Longden said, smiling up at her from his horizontal position on the grass.

Netta looked down into the bronzed face with a curious intentness. It was a good face to look into, not particularly handsome, but a face to trust instinctively, with kind eyes and a firm mouth.

"Tucks and hair," she replied, see-sawing the bough by kicking her foot against the trunk.

"I see. Down with the tucks and up with the hair. A sort of pulling-out-at-both-ends business."

Netta nodded.

"Then on Thursday we shall expect an elongated edition to dinner?"

"Don't be too sure," Netta retorted, see-sawing violently. "No tucks mean no football, no tree-climbing, no fun of any sort."

"You will be eighteen on Thursday," Harold reminded her with a frown.

Netta suddenly stopped see-sawing.

"Harold, do you want me to grow up?" she asked.

"Yes," Harold replied, raising himself on his elbow.

For a long, sweet second through the golden-green twilight of the orchard the blue eyes looked up into the brown. Then the bough bent with a creek and a jerk, and Netta's black legs began to vanish up the tree.

"I can get to the very top, Harold!" she cried in a curiously high-pitched shaky voice.

"Come down!" Harold exclaimed almost roughly, raising himself with a quick movement which was checked by a sudden painful contraction of his mouth. "You know I can't come after you with this lame leg."

"'Nobody asked you, sir, she said,'" Netta cried shrilly, waving a hand from between the topmost branches.

A hurt expression came into Harold's eyes.

"Aren't you coming down?" he asked in a stern voice.

"'We won't go home till morning,'" Netta sang, shaking the branches, but keeping her face hidden.

Harold limped silently away to the sound of the mocking song. He did not see a tragic, tear-stained face thrust from between the leaves to watch him out of sight even when the song was at its shrillest, nor that Netta swung herself swiftly from the tree and knelt to kiss the mossy mound which had been his pillow.

"I'll do it! Those tucks shall come out!" she exclaimed, hurriedly wiping away her tears.

Harold Longden closed the gate of the orchard behind him, cut across a corner of the huge kitchen-garden and through an arched door in the high, grey wall, reached the west terrace of Winstone Manor, his beautiful old home.

A lady sat in the shadow of the long, low house with some needlework in her hand and a book on her knee. She looked up at the sound of Harold's halting step on the stone flags and a spasm of pain passed swiftly across her stern, handsome face. As the daughter, wife and mother of soldiers, Mrs. Longden knew as much as most British women of the cost of serving Britain, and had paid it bravely, but the maiming of this, her youngest, last, and dearest cut her to the quick. She was smiling, however, when Harold dropped listlessly into a wicker chair at her side.

"What have you done with Netta?" she asked, when she saw that her son was alone.

"Netta is at the top of an apple-tree singing 'We won't go home till morning,'" Harold replied in a studiously level voice.

"What is worrying you? Can I help?" Mrs. Longden asked quickly.

"You are too sharp, mother," Harold said, smiling.

"What is it?" Mrs. Longden asked.

"Is eighteen and thirty-five a ludicrous combination? I want to marry Netta. She loves me, perhaps only with a child's love, though. Do you think that it would be taking an unfair advantage to marry her?" Harold asked slowly.

Mrs. Longden looked a little startled, and then laughed a little.

"I am so relieved. I feared it might be the mother!" she said.

"Mrs. Carylon? Oh, no! She is a very fascinating little woman, but I don't want to marry her," Harold replied, with some surprise.

"Have you been saying something to Netta this afternoon, then?" Mrs. Longden asked.

"N—no—er—I said nothing, but she is perhaps going to let out a few tucks for Thursday."

"I shall be much astonished if her mother allows any tucks to be let out," Mrs. Longden said quietly.

"But Mrs. Carylon has often assured me that Netta simply won't grow up," Harold objected.

"Mrs. Carylon is uncommonly fond of assuring people that Netta simply won't grow up," Mrs. Longden replied shortly.

"You have always been prejudiced against Mrs. Carylon, mother," Harold said, smiling. "Surely you cannot imagine that she does not want Netta to grow up."

"That is just what I do imagine," Mrs. Longden said calmly.

"I think you must be mistaken."

Mrs. Longden was silent.

"Sometimes when Netta is in a serious mood," Harold continued, after a brief silence, "she seems almost a woman in her thoughts. There have been times when I could have told her—everything. But how can one make love to a child in short frocks? It seems—well, brutal. Have you noticed how like she is growing to poor Carylon?"

"Yes. She is very like her father. I am glad."

"Would you be glad to have Netta for a daughter, mother?" Harold asked wistfully.

"There is no one whom I should like you to marry more than Netta. I have grown to love the child very dearly during your absence. Mail days always found her here on some excuse or other. She has adored you all her life," Mrs. Longden said, rising and folding up her work.

Harold knew that his mother never said what she did not mean, and was satisfied, all unconscious of the agony of renunciation which so many mothers bear in smiling silence.

* * * * *

"Netta, what can you be doing?"

Mrs. Carylon stood on the threshold of Netta's bedroom, her small, dainty figure suddenly rigid with anger and a steely look in her pale blue eyes.

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"I know that it is mean and horrid of me, mother, to be altering this on the sly," Netta said, holding up the blue dress at which she was sewing, "but you know how I begged and prayed to be allowed a longer dress for my eighteenth birthday, and you would order me this just as short as ever. Fortunately, it has endless tucks, so I have let a few out and run ribbon over them to hide the stitching."

"How dared you!" Mrs. Carylon exclaimed furiously.

"Mother," Netta said, with trembling lips, "you cannot keep me pretending to be a child any longer. I have romped and played when I hated it just to seem what you tell everybody I am, but I won't do it any more. There are many people here who know my real age, if I am so small."

"Really, Netta, are you mad?" Mrs. Carylon exclaimed angrily, but with scarlet face. "And it is unpardonable of you to spoil this entirely new dress," she continued. "Give it to me. The tucks must be run in again carefully by hand."

"Oh, mother, I want to wear it to-night," Netta cried, clutching the dress to her breast.

"To-night! And why to-night, pray? There will be no one at the Longdens' save ourselves. It is only Harold's usual whim that you should go to dinner on your birthday."

Netta's face crimsoned and she held the frock tightly.

"And are you going to do up your hair to-night?" Mrs. Carylon asked, her eyes gleaming with a hard, fierce light.

"Yes," Netta replied, shrinking away from her mother. "It won't really make you look any older, mother, if I am grown up."

Mrs. Carylon suddenly bore down on Netta and snatched the dress from her clasp.

"If you act the naughty child, you must be treated as such," she said vindictively, turning to the door with the dress in her hand, furious that Netta had fathomed her selfish dread.

"Oh, mother, you can't love me a bit! I don't believe you ever have loved me. You have always thought me a nuisance," Netta wailed, the tragedy of her short life at last breaking into speech.

A few minutes later Harold Longden with a fat parcel under his arm crossed the road from his own park-gates to Mrs. Carylon's cottage, also his, and let at a merely nominal rent to the widow of his old friend, Dick Carylon, who had died on a far-off frontier battlefield, begging Harold to look after his girl-wife and baby child. Harold had almost reached the house when Netta cannoned wildly against him in her headlong career along the winding path.

"Why, Netta!" he exclaimed, at the sight of her tear-stained face. "What is the matter?"

"I—I simply can't grow up. There will be no tucks let out!" Netta sobbed, breaking away from him and rushing to the gate.

Harold was on the point of limping after her, when Mrs. Carylon's gay voice called him from an open window.

"Are you wondering if Netta has suddenly taken leave of her senses?" she asked, as Harold approached. "It is only the result of a little argument concerning tucks. The funny child simply will not grow up, but I don't suppose a mere man can connect tucks with growing up, can he?" and Mrs. Carylon smiled bewitchingly upon Harold, who, for once, responded but feebly to her chatter. He was intent upon following Netta and getting to the bottom of this tuck mystery, but Mrs. Carylon had not done with him yet.

"I am thinking of ceasing to be your grateful tenant shortly, and going abroad," she said, watching Harold covertly.

"Indeed! We shall be sorry to lose you," he said quietly, making up his mind that Netta should not accompany her mother, if he could help it.

Mrs. Carylon's face hardened, and the hopes which she had never quite ceased to entertain of remaining as mistress of Winstone Manor, finally vanished. Harold left his parcel for Netta, and took a speedy departure. Two hours later he reached home tired and aching after a long, vain hunt. None of Netta's usual haunts contained her, and it had begun to rain heavily. Harold felt anxious, and waited impatiently for the evening, after describing to his mother his encounter with Netta in the cottage garden.

Mrs. Longden had an appointment with her dressmaker, and drove into the neighbouring large town during the afternoon. As the carriage splashed along a muddy country road on its return, the two fat, grey horses came up with a little, dripping figure plodding wearily along by the hedge. Mrs. Longden pulled the check-string sharply, and put her head out of the window.

"Netta, what are you doing here? Get in at once," she said.

Netta obeyed meekly. She was worn out by this time by sheer physical fatigue. Slow, heavy tears rolled down her cheeks, but she said nothing, nor did Mrs. Longden question her. The carriage entered the park on the side furthest from Mrs. Carylon's cottage.

"You had better stay on for the evening," Mrs. Carylon said, when they stopped. "I will send a note to your mother."

Netta got out obediently, too limp and miserable to care what happened. But an hour later, after a hot bath and tea, when she lay on the sofa before the small, bright fire in Mrs. Longden's bedroom, a sudden burst of laughter escaped her.

"Oh, Mrs. Longden, do you think me quite demented?" she cried.

"No, my dear. I have tried to literally tramp out of worries myself," Mrs. Longden replied tranquilly from the depths of her deep, soft chair.

"Oh, then, you know how it hurts," Netta said tremulously.

Mrs. Longden suddenly slipped to the floor and took the girl in her arms.

"I don't believe you are half as stern as you look," Netta whispered, clinging to her wildly.

"Harold didn't see me looking like a drowned rat, did he?" she asked presently.

"No, I don't suppose that he knows you are here. I merely sent word that I was having tea in my room," Mrs. Longden replied smiling.

"I expect mother will send me some clothes," Netta said, with a heavy sigh.

"Suppose I lend you some old finery of my young days. Girls usually like to dress up," Mrs. Longden said, going to a high, oak press. A brilliant flash of hope filled Netta's eyes.

"Oh, Mrs. Longden, how lovely! Please let me get dressed at once! What fun it will be!" Netta cried excitedly, springing from the sofa.

Mrs. Longden laughed softly, as she bent over the drawer and raised a fold of rustling tissue paper. A faint fragrance of lavender stole through the room.

* * * * *

Harold went into the library before dinner, intending to read until his visitors arrived. A small fire had been lit here as elsewhere on account of the rain, and there was somebody standing before it on the hearth-rug, her head and shoulders indistinct in the dusk.

The firelight played upon a faded purple skirt with a flowery pattern running over it. The figure was far too slender for his mother. Who could it be? Harold paused in surprise. A burst of merry laughter made him tingle from head to foot. Whose laughter save Netta's had that peculiar thrilling note?

"I don't believe you know me, Harold. What fun! Your mother found me out for a walk wet through, and brought me home by the south gate? This is one of her old gowns. Isn't it a beauty? And Betsy has done up my hair in a quaint fashion to match. How do I look? I am quite grown up and without letting tucks out either, but the tucks have done it after all," Netta wound up incoherently.

Harold was striking a match. What he saw by the candle-light made him suddenly shy and dumb. Such a dainty

(*Concluded at foot of next page.*)

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# BRAND NEW COMPETITION.

**Starts next Tuesday.**

*Cash Down.* *Cash Down.* *Cash Down.*

## 1st Prize, £50. 2nd Prize, £25. 3rd Prize, £10.

### 25 Splendid Gramophones.

**An entirely new competition will be placed before the public for the first time in "Short Stories" dated March 28th, which will be on sale next Tuesday. It will be exceedingly simple, and will be open to every person who reads "Short Stories."**

## WHAT YOU WILL HAVE TO DO.

The competition will consist of paragraphs containing the buried names of Railway Stations in the United Kingdom. You will have to write in the spaces given the names of the Railway Stations so indicated.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to *Bradshaw's Guide*, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or No. 8 Room, 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The first prize of £50 will be given to the Competitor who fills in the greatest number of Railway Stations under the conditions stated.

The second prize of £25 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in the order of merit.

**THE FIRST PARAGRAPHS WILL APPEAR IN *SHORT STORIES* ON SALE NEXT TUESDAY. ORDER YOUR COPY NOW.**


old-time figure stood revealed, with such a delicate, quaint charm about it, a woman where he had looked for a child. A brilliant colour flooded the thin, young face, and the dark eyes were starry with the hint of recent tears.

"I suppose you are not really grown up. It is only a mere frolic," Harold said hesitatingly at last.

Netta's lips opened, then closed again. She looked away from Harold restlessly, and seemed more than once on the point of speaking. A fierce battle between love and loyalty was going on within her.

"Tell me why you want me to grow up," she said at last with a crimson face.

"Dear, I want to ask you to marry me. I'm thirty-five and a broken-down old soldier, but——"

"Don't! I won't hear such rubbish! That is, I mean the 'broken-down old soldier' is all rubbish!" Netta cried, throwing her arms round Harold's neck. "And I am grown up if you want me to be," she whispered a few minutes later.

* * * * *

"And so you found my little, lost birdie out in the rain, dear Mrs. Longden. Was it not foolish of the funny darling to go for a walk on such a day? But I am never anxious about her. She is such a Wandering Jew. It is so good of you to have kept her, and thank you so much for sending the carriage for me. And where is the truant now?" Mrs. Carylon asked, looking round the long south drawing-room as she greeted her hostess.

"In the library with Harold, I believe. Here they are!"

"Netta!" And Mrs. Carylon's silvery-sweet voice acquired suddenly a harsh, angry note, which made Harold give the hand he held a close grip.

"Doesn't she look nice?" Mrs. Longden said. "We had just dressed her up when her own clothes came, and we were too charmed to undress her."

"Will you give me Netta for my wife, Mrs. Carylon?" Harold asked with soldierly promptness, holding Netta's hand fast.

"My dear Harold," Mrs. Carylon exclaimed *staccato* fashion, "to-morrow she will be a romping tomboy again."

"I don't think so, but I am quite willing to risk it," Harold replied.

"The child does not possess a single long frock! The thing is preposterous," Mrs. Carylon continued, with a violent attempt at laughter.

"Let a few tucks out," Mrs. Longden suggested, with secret malice, and Mrs. Carylon's face flamed.

"Ah, Netta, you won't quarrel with me about tucks again!" she exclaimed boldly, confident of Netta's loyalty.

"No, mother," Netta murmured, shrinking towards Harold.

**H. Ward.**

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**GREAT NEW SERIES.** **YOU CAN BEGIN HERE.**

# Confessions of a Self-made Girl

*The writer of these Confessions relates in this series of articles the true story of her life, from the time when she left Cornwall, an unsophisticated but ambitious girl, until she made her name and fortune. Her name is well known to you.*

[*For the purposes of these Confessions I am calling myself Maud Cardew, as my real name is too well known for me to wish to make the story of my life public in this manner.*]

## MY HEART'S DESIRE.

I AM a native of a seaside village in Cornwall. As I grew up I began to tire of the monotony of the life and determined to go out into the world and make a name for myself.

One day when I was in the ruins of the Old Keep, which is on the cliffs, meditating upon what I should do were I free to carve out my own destiny, two strangers appeared—evidently tourists, I thought. They told me they had decided to stay in the neighbourhood for a few days, and asked if I knew of any lodgings. I said that my father would be glad to put them up at the farm, and accordingly they came home with me.

Their names were the Honourable Robert Lestrange (commonly called Bobbie) and Di Northcote.

I told these two Londoners of my desire to see the world. Bobbie encouraged me in my ambitions, but Di advised me to stay at home. This, however, was not at all in my line, as I told him, and when he saw that nothing would shake me from my resolve, he promised to try to find something for me to do when I arrived in the great city. I made up my mind that I would do marvellous things, and become a great lady of the land—a duchess if possible.

There was a thick fog in London the day I arrived. Bobbie met me, and we started off in a hansom to my lodgings in Bloomsbury. On the way we encountered a dray drawn by some restive horses. Bobbie alighted to give what assistance he could. In the meantime I got frightened and left the cab, of which I soon lost sight in the fog, which was getting thicker.

While I stood on the steps of a house I heard a man's voice asking me to come inside and wait until the fog cleared. Feeling that I couldn't find Bobbie again I accepted the invitation.

We had tea, after which the man became rather familiar, and I had had about enough of him when Di came in, looking very surprised to find me there. He took me to my lodgings, where Bobbie was waiting, and the latter told me that the man in whose rooms I had been was Lord Cecil Trevor, one of the worst "men about town."

## MY FIRST SITUATION.

AT eleven o'clock the next morning I was all ready for Di. By a most ingenious arrangement of screens and art serge, the fireplace end of my apartment was easily transformed into a sitting-room, and on the whole I was rather pleased with it.

True the window looked out on to a backyard, and a hideous grey building effectually blocked all chance of seeing the sky, except by flattening your nose against the glass; but I could easily rise above such drawbacks at that period, by the simple process of listening to the distant rumble of vehicles, that hummed "London, London, London," to my enchanted ears.

The pictures and books in the room also, I remember, left a good deal to be desired; and one of the former particularly—a large portrait of an eminent divine—had a most annoying habit of following all my movements, with a pair of condemning eyes.

I hated that picture, yet I never had the courage throughout my stay to ask the landlady to remove it.

The expression gave me a feeling that he spent the time cheerfully consigning me to a certain hot region, along with all the rest of humanity except a few favoured saints of whom he was the honoured head.

Bobbie, on the other hand, was fascinated by him. He would even stand and look at him with a familiar smile, and once he remarked, with a nod: "I say, old chappie, mind that fire doesn't get too low."

Well, to proceed, by a somewhat grotesque ordering of events, it was with the little backyard behind, and this hated picture, which was supported by a fearful and wonderful copy of "The Pilgrim's Progress," that I, the ambitious worldling, stood to receive Di Northcote.

He came into the room, leaving the door wide open, just the quiet, deliberate, business-like man he had always shown himself. It was a manner, that to me, in those days, was most irritating.

I fancied he was patronising, that he regarded me as a little country girl full of ridiculous notions only to be cured by experience; and I went very near to hating him. For, as you have probably observed, I am a young person with a very high opinion of myself, and not in the least addicted to crying small.

"How do you do?" he replied to my greeting. "I hope you are rested, and none the worse for your adventures yesterday."

I thanked him, and remarked that they had not been very

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serious, then took the seat opposite to him. He got to business immediately.

"As I daresay you can imagine," he began, "it is anything but easy for a young stranger to come up to London and find occupation at once. As a matter of fact, it is exceedingly hard."

He paused a moment; but, as I had nothing to say, he went on:

"Of course influence is the great thing in this, as in all else, and because I have a particular weakness for our friend Bobbie, I have promised to exert mine on your behalf."

I thought he need not have been so impressive about his help being for Bobbie's sake; but I had the sense to realise that it mattered little enough so long as he exerted it for me.

"I have, in consequence," he continued, "managed to secure you a 'post as 'trier on,' I think that's what they call it, at Philips and Philips."

"Trier on!" I repeated vaguely, no doubt looking my astonishment. I don't know what I expected him to get for me, possibly I imagined myself private secretary to the Queen already, but I know the idea of being a 'trier on,' came as a considerable shock.

"Yes," he said, without moving a muscle of his face. "You try on mantles, and jackets, and those kinds of things, to show customers how they look."

I gazed at the fire for a few moments and wondered whether he was teasing me.

"Does a post like that require much influence?" I asked at last, with a touch of sarcasm.

"I secured this one through a Duchess," he replied.

Again there was a pause, then I said:

"Is the shop hers?"

"No," he told me, "but it is quite a usual thing for a good customer to be able to get these posts for girls at the best shops." He regarded me coolly in that slow way of his. "You don't much fancy it?" he said.

"I should not imagine it gives much scope," I replied, and doubtless my lips curled a little as they will at times.

"Scope for what?"

"Anything."

"There I think you are wrong. It will probably prove a useful means of discovering in what particular direction your talent lies. Meanwhile it is good pay. You begin in a fortnight, and it will be best for you to live in."

"Live in?" I repeated. "What does that mean?"

"Live on the premises. It is always usual for girls holding these posts to live in, but if you like to try to make your salary enough to live out, I believe it is possible to get permission. As I said before, I strongly advise your doing as the rest do."

"I should prefer to remain here," I said promptly. "How much salary am I to have?"

"Two pounds a week. Why do you wish to stay here?"

I found myself confronting Di Northcote, with an angry gleam in his face such as I had never seen before.

"I like to feel independent and I can manage quite well on that. Thank you very much indeed for being at so much trouble on my account."

"Not at all," he answered, rising to go. "I hope you will like your new post." Before leaving he stood for a few moments and looked at me hard. "I hope you will be very careful," he said, "where you go and with whom you associate in London. A young girl living alone cannot be too careful."

I bit my lips and made no reply.

"And don't do just whatever Bobbie wants you to," he went on in the same cool manner. "He's very hot-headed and foolish sometimes."

I glanced up indignantly. I could not let anyone slander Bobbie. At that moment my landlady passed the open door.

"He is just splendid!" I said shortly.

"You are quite right, he is," he answered, with perfect equanimity, "but he is also very young, and all young men are foolish. If you will let him, he will spend a great deal of money on you, but at the same time he cannot afford it."

"Really, Mr. Northcote!" I exclaimed hotly, "I cannot understand your speaking to me like this. I do not want Mr. Lestrange to spend sixpence on me, or indeed anything. Your advice borders upon insult."

He shrugged his shoulders in a way that made one want to shake him.

"My dear Miss Cardew," he said, "as I only know you so very slightly, circumstances compel me to judge you at present according to my knowledge of your sex generally. If my warning proves to have been unnecessary, I can only say that I shall be extremely glad."

"Then you may be glad now," I said haughtily, and, half-turning away, stared at the wall in front of me.

Unfortunately I hit just the right angle to catch the eye of that horrid divine, and if I had not been so indignant I must have smiled, and spoilt my admirable pose. For it seemed to me that he winked deliberately, then rubbed his hands together with a grin of anticipation.

"Good-morning," said Di cheerfully, taking up his hat.

"Good-morning," I replied, just glancing at him. For one second as our eyes met, I saw a gleam of admiration pass through his; then it was gone again almost instantly, and he bowed himself out, the careless, apathetic man of the world.

When Bobbie came a little later, I was still feeling very sore.

"Why," I said, "does your friend, Mr. Northcote, seem to make a special point of insulting me?"

"What's he been saying now?" he asked, looking amused.

"He took upon himself to give me advice concerning you. Told me not to do just what you wanted, and said that you

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would spend a lot of money on me, if I let you. Ridiculous! As if I should dream of such a thing! Why, how could you spend a lot of money on me in a few days, as he seemed to imply."

Bobbie put his head on one side whimsically, and looked plaintive.

"There was one girl," he said slowly, "who got through one thousand, three hundred pounds, eighteen shillings and sixpence in five weeks."

"Impossible!" I ejaculated. "Were you very much in love with her?" I added.

"I suppose I thought I was," he said, with that same whimsical air. "She had beautiful auburn locks, which took off, only I didn't know it then, and big blue eyes and tiny little feet, and—well—and—anyhow, that's what she got out of me."

"You must be very rich, Bobbie," I said wonderingly.

"It just depends," he answered, with a solemn air. "Some weeks I'm not badly off at all; and others I'm obliged to be very polite and nice to anyone who would be likely to lend me a 'pony' in a needy moment."

"A pony!" I asked in surprise. "Do you mean to run away on?"

Bobbie shouted at that.

"Oh, you little innocent!" he cried, enjoying it immensely, "what a lot I shall have to teach you. I'll tell you what, we'll go and spend one now as I happen to be pretty flush, and then you'll understand all about it."

I put on my hat, and then he called a hansom and directed the driver to the Savoy Hotel, where he ordered a reckless lunch, including some expensive champagne and liqueurs. I enjoyed it immensely, for Bobbie was always good company, and I quite forgot Di Northcote's injunctions.

What that day cost Bobbie, I am afraid to think in the light of my present knowledge, but at the time ignorance was bliss, and I agreed to all his extravagant proposals without a word.

The people everywhere interested me immensely, but I did not like the way the men stared. My first impulse was to stare them out, but when I communicated this to Bobbie, he seemed highly tickled, and told me it would be most unwise.

I asked him why they stared so, and he said they always did at beautiful girls. Personally, I was more conscious of my countrified, ill-fitting costume than anything, and fancied they were criticising that, for I was convinced I did not look at all nice.

"My dear girl," Bobbie remarked, when I mentioned the fact, "if *you* went about dressed in sackcloth the men would still stare at you. Nothing, in fact, short of a mask, could prevent it."

I am disposed to think if anyone went about dressed in sackcloth, be their faces what they may, they would get stared at; but evidently that escaped Bobbie's observation at the moment.

After lunch we went to a *matinée*, and that was my first introduction to a London theatre. We sat in the stalls, and before we had been seated many minutes, someone suddenly tapped Bobbie on the back, and said in tones of huge enjoyment:

"What ho, Bobbie! At it again!"

Bobbie turned sharply, looking a little annoyed, but immediately his face broke into smiles, and he grasped the other man's hand.

"Harcourt! By Jove!" he exclaimed. "What the dickens are you doing in London? I thought you were in India."

"I'm home on sick leave," said the other man. "Had malaria, and was packed off on the *Victoria*, Bobbie," he added solemnly, with a twinkle as irrepressible as Bobbie's own—"The Wednesday before I sailed you were at a *matinée*, and that time it was very small, and dainty, and dark."

"Yes," said Bobbie sadly, "and very expensive."

Then he turned to me.

"Miss Cardew," he said, "let me introduce you to the bravest soldier in the British Army, and the biggest scoundrel out of it. He stands—or I should say, sits here—and his name is Nelson Harcourt.

"We were boys together," he went on sentimentally—"when we were young we loved the same girl, ate the same sweets, were ill over the same first cigar, and were generally caned for the same reason.

"Since then we have cut our wisdom teeth, and now we love different girls, drink each other's wines, smoke each other's cigars, and can give David and Jonathan points in loving. If Nelson, or Flip, as I always call him, has a fault, it's turning up when he isn't wanted; but he's a good chap to take a hint." And he winked in the most bare-faced manner.

I shook hands with Captain Harcourt, and from that moment until years later he fell trying to save a wounded trooper at Spion Kop, we were the greatest of friends. Indeed, all my life I must ever have in my heart a specially tender spot for those two handsome, careless-hearted boys. As a matter of fact, they were about my own age, but they were such thorough children by nature, I could never help mothering them.

All they did for me, and for each other, and for anyone they cared about who happened to be down on his luck, would fill a book, although one young life was cut short so early gloriously winning his V.C.

Whenever I think of Flip, there is something in my heart that seems to snap, and the tears fall inwardly. He was so brave, so beautiful, so lovable.

I do not know if his mother broke her heart when she heard he would never come back to us again, but I know that she wears the Victoria Cross awarded by a gracious sovereign to his memory tied round her throat, although it bruises and scars her delicate flesh.

After the *matinée* we went to Bobbie's club to tea, and then, because he wanted to make a day of it, nothing would do but he must buy me an evening blouse to go to the theatre in at night.

Flip did not come with us this time, as he had another engagement, and Bobbie frankly confessed that he was not sorry.

During the next few days I went out with the two of them several times, and we all enjoyed ourselves immensely. Then they went away together to Bobbie's country home, and I had two days alone, before going to Philips and Philips.

My first day was not a happy one. I was hopelessly at sea, and the other girls, instead of trying to help me, regarded me with a cold, quizzing air. The head of the department did her best, but I was never cut out for a saleswoman, and she began to grow impatient before the day was over.

I remember there was one mantle she particularly wanted to get rid of, a hideous, gaudy thing, with a lot of gold beads on it, and when a dressy, common little woman came to buy, she said to me: "Sell her that."

I put it on and thought what a sight I looked, and when the little woman asked me if I thought it would suit her, I said frankly that I thought not. However, she put it on and seemed rather to like it, turning and twisting about before the glass in order to see it on all sides.

"It is rather nice," she said. "Do you really think it doesn't suit me?"

"I think you would much prefer this," was my answer, and put on one of the newest and prettiest we had.

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She exclaimed with delight, and bought it on the spot; and I got into trouble with the principal.

"What does it matter what a person like that wears?" she answered to my attempted explanation. "You could easily have persuaded her to take the beaded thing; she was the very customer for it; and now you have let an article go that would have satisfied someone who knew how to dress."

After a few days I understood that the cleverest saleswoman was the one who succeeded in persuading customers to buy the things least likely to sell.

Not that I ever became a success in the slightest degree; and after a little I was specially reserved for the few tall, exacting young ladies who knew just what suited them and were totally deaf to persuasion.

To my surprise Di Northcote met me that first evening when the day's work was over.

"How do you do?" he said simply, accosting me as I stood a moment wondering which 'bus to take.

A little fat man near by, who had been watching me closely, was just advancing as if to speak, so I was very relieved at the sound of Di's voice.

"I'm very well, thanks," I answered; "which 'bus ought I to take?"

He pulled out his watch.

"I have an hour to spare," he said, "will you come with me and have some dinner?"

I went at once, feeling rather pleased, for it was the first time he had suggested taking me anywhere.

At first we talked about my work, and I think he was a good deal amused at my description of my own selling experiences. I told him that I had made friends with one of the girls—a new girl—who had agreed to share rooms with me.

"Why did you make up your mind to live out?" he asked at last, going suddenly to the point.

"How did you know that I had done so?" I retorted.

Something about Di's way of questioning always made me put my back up and feel prickly, so to speak.

"Bobbie told me," he answered, adding: "I was sorry to hear it."

"Why?" I asked.

"Oh, various reasons. For one thing you will probably meet with a good deal of unpleasantness when you start home in the evening. That is partly why I met you to-night."

I remembered the little fat man, and asked: "What kind of unpleasantness?"

"There are a great many men," he replied, "who wait about near the big shops for the girls like yourself to come out in the evening. They are a class of men that you will do well to systematically avoid."

"And do you think I should be inclined to do anything else?" I asked, looking straight into his eyes.

He looked straight back at me. "That is what I have to learn," he said.

I felt angry, but it was no use losing my temper, for already I began to realise nothing would make the slightest impression upon him, and he would only preserve the same unruffled calm. Instead I determined to try to meet him on his own ground, so to speak.

"It is good of you to take so much interest in me," I said sarcastically.

"Not at all," he replied. "I am doing it entirely for my own amusement."

I could have shaken him for that, but instead I bit my lip and went on with my dinner in silence.

I felt he was watching me closely, and when at last I looked up that odd gleam of admiration shot through his eyes again. At the same time I think he annoyed me purposely.

"Don't ever go to dinner with any man unless you know who he is," he said, "and it is better not to dine alone at a restaurant in the evening. If you have made up your mind not to remain in, go straight home to your room, or else join another girl who is above cheapening herself by dining with a stranger. It is a sensible plan to share rooms with another girl."

I still went on with my dinner in silent disapproval, feeling, in spite of myself, like a schoolgirl being lectured.

"And be on your guard," he continued with emphasis, "against any such men as Lord Cecil Trevor, otherwise you run a serious risk of a soiled reputation, however groundless. It is very likely he will attempt to meet you again; but if he does have nothing whatever to do with him."

"I did not know he was a lord," I said with interest.

"It is a mere detail," Di answered. "What need concern you most is that he is a scoundrel."

We had finished dinner then, and the subject dropped; but in spite of my own experience and Di's warning I could not resist a certain curiosity about Lord Cecil Trevor. I felt as if I should like to meet him again just to see how he would treat me now.

The opportunity occurred in a most unlooked-for manner. A week after I went to Philips and Philips, a ball was arranged by the employees in the large recreation room.

These balls took place often, and were usually very good fun. We gave sixpence each towards the refreshments, which consisted of cakes, coffee, and lemonade, and provided our own music; in fact, the whole thing was got up entirely among ourselves, and we usually spent the evening before waxing the floor and getting the room ready.

Although I scarcely knew any of the men at the first one I attended, I had no lack of partners, for there was not much ceremony of introduction, and a pretty face needed no other advancement. At about ten o'clock Lizzie Brown—my friend—told me she felt tired and was going home. I told her I would follow as soon as the dance was over.

When the evening was nearly over I sat for a short time alone in a little alcove watching, rather glad of a rest, and not anxious for a partner. The dancers looked very pretty, and I was too engrossed in them to notice that a tall new-comer had made his way to the alcove, and now stood beside me.

In consequence, when he suddenly remarked, "This is a most unexpected pleasure, Miss Cardew," I started violently, and on turning to face Lord Cecil Trevor, much to my annoyance coloured to the roots of my hair. I felt that it rather pleased him, and was furious with myself.

"May I sit down?" he said, and without waiting for me to speak took the vacant chair beside me. "You are looking extremely well," he next remarked. "London evidently suits you."

By this time I had regained my composure, and I now turned to him carelessly and asked, hoping to annoy him—

"Do you serve in Philips and Philips too, then?"

"Well no, not exactly," he answered, looking amused. "Not that I should mind," he added, "if my counter were opposite yours; but I should certainly have neither ears nor eyes for customers."

"Hooks and eyes, I suppose you mean?" I put in.

"Good!" he remarked. "You're evidently a smart little girl."

I suddenly became engrossed in the dancers, but at the same time was most curious to know how he came to be there.

"You did not expect to see me here to-night, I daresay," he said next.

"I did not think about it," I answered.

"Probably not. I however, knew I should in all likelihood see you."

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"How did you know?" I inquired, unable to conceal my curiosity.

"Oh, it was simple enough. You told me your address, you know, and I easily discovered you were going to Philips and Philips. Young Fred Philips was at Oxford with me, and I know him well, so I asked him to send me word when the next dance was on. I have been to several before with him.

"I got a line this morning, but I had to show myself at a big 'At Home' at the Duchess of Rowney's to-night, and that made me late. Otherwise I should have come early, and tried to fill up your programme."

"And supposing I had objected?" I said.

"But you wouldn't. I'd soon have talked you round. Did you think I behaved very badly the other afternoon?"

"Yes," I said coolly. "Very."

"Well, I'm awfully sorry," he answered at once. "You're not quite like the ordinary run of girls, and I ought to have seen it sooner. A man can't do more than apologise. Will you be friends?"

"I don't know," I replied warily, leaning back and assuming a somewhat grand, indifferent air.

"Why don't you know? I suppose Northcote has been painting me very black. It's a favourite trick of his, and he's no saint himself, either. I shouldn't take you for the kind of girl to believe just what she is told about a fellow without finding out for herself."

Now had it been anyone but Di who had warned me I should probably have held my ground; but because it was he, and I had in my heart a perpetual antagonism against his domineering sway, I decided to act for myself and risk the consequences.

"I don't mind being friends," I said at last, "so long as you treat me properly; but if you transgress in any way I shall drop you at once."

He promised, and we had the next two dances together, and I am bound to confess I thoroughly enjoyed them. He was a perfect waltzer, and knew how to be a pleasant companion; and although he still persisted in looking at me in a way that made me feel embarrassed, I was sure Di had judged him too harshly. They were the last dances, and when the music stopped he asked me if I had anyone to see me home.

I told him I did not need anyone, but he insisted upon coming.

We went out together, and there being no vacant hansom about we walked a short distance in search of one.

At the corner of Oxford Circus we stood a moment under a gas lamp waiting. A hansom came in sight, and Lord Cecil had just hailed it, when someone touched my arm, and remarked in most cutting tones—

"What a fortunate circumstance, Miss Cardew. I am just in time to see you home."

I turned sharply, and found myself fronting Di Northcote, with an angry gleam in his face such as I had never seen before.

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*(Next Tuesday I will tell you of my interview with a theatrical manager.)*

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## Result of the "Same Letter" Competition.

A Gramophone has been sent to the following competitors:

A. Earney, Earldoms, near Whiteparish, Salisbury, Wilts; Miss F. Selby, 137 Queen's Park Road, Brighton; A. J. Wilson, Manchester Stores, Main Street, Kimberley, Notts; H. Gale, 54 Elder Road, Bramley, Leeds; G. H. Wilshire, Fore Street, Newquay, Cornwall; A. Mitchell, 131 Easter Road, Leith; Miss M. Davies, 107 Camden Street, Birkenhead; E. Payne, 1 Hilsea Terrace, Lower Clapton, N.E.; W. Powell, 35 Church Street, Blaina, Mon.; E. C. Rudge, Abbey Manor, Evesham.

## His Last Request.

### The Tale of a Man, a Woman, and a Kiss.

"George Ferguson, you have gone a little too far."

Pale with indignation and outraged pride, the young woman looked him sternly in the face.

"Why, Laura," he stammered, in a helpless confusion, "I—I—ah—er—I didn't think you would care."

"Didn't think I should care!" she echoed, with freezing mockery. "Did you think, sir, that an acquaintance of ten or twelve months entitles you to a privilege unasked, that my most intimate friends of many years' standing would not have dared to claim? Have you no conception of the meaning of the word presumption?"

What had this young man done? Intoxicated by her beauty, and fancying he saw in her glorious dark eyes a challenge, half coy, half saucy, he had rapturously kissed her.

Dumb with astonishment, George Ferguson now quailed before the lightning-like indignation of the high-spirited girl.

He saw he had made a fatal mistake.

"This must end our acquaintance, Mr. Ferguson," she said.

"In many respects it has been a pleasant one. I had come to esteem you highly—to regard you as a young man of high and noble impulses, free from the trivialities and weaknesses, the inordinate self-conceit and assurance that the spirit of the age seems to infuse into the mental constitutions of the young men of modern society.

"You have thrown yourself down from the pedestal upon which I had mistakenly placed you. Mr. Ferguson," she continued sadly, "hereafter we meet as strangers."

"Be it so, Laura Jones," replied he, with recovered self-possession. "I shall not presume to question your right to dismiss me thus summarily, however strongly I might feel inclined to protest against the injustice of your act in so doing. I bow to your mandate.

"Henceforth we are strangers. But before I take my last farewell of you, as I am now about to do, and go out into the world to struggle with it as only a sorrowing, lonely man, deprived of his last earthly hope, must struggle to keep bitter despair from knawing his heart-strings asunder.

"Before I leave for ever the presence of one with whom I have passed so many pleasant hours, whose memory will cling to me through all the cheerless years that may yet drag their weary length over my head, I have one last request to make of you."

"What is it, sir?"

"Please get off my lap."

**Audrey Wrexford.**

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She: "If you could have one wish, what would it be?" He: "It would be that—that—oh, if I only dared to tell you what it would be!" She: "Well, go on. Why do you suppose I brought up the wishing subject?"

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# A FALLEN IDOL.

## The Tale of a Love that was Lasting.

"Shall I write now or wait till to-morrow?" Miss Irene Meredith's maturely beautiful face assumed a more thoughtful expression. "I shall see *him* to-night, and——"

Another pause.

"Is it true that there is still an open door at the back of my heart to admit that which I thought was shut out for ever? I scarcely know; I do not like to admit, yet why have I waited all these years, why have I persistently refused for months to give Cyril his answer? I will wait! So Cyril must be patient yet another day, and this evening I shall see and talk with Randall Atherton!"

She replaced the addressed envelope and the blank sheet of notepaper in her writing-case, and gave herself up to reminiscent meditation till her maid warned her that it was time to dress for the grand reception and private theatricals at Lady Hindford's.

Irene Meredith was a woman of thirty, with a maturely beautiful face and the sedate, almost queenly bearing of one who has left the lightness of girlhood far behind but yet possesses youth; a strange admixture that makes a charming whole.

The face, if studied, would have revealed to the student a character ennobled and rendered more attractive by suffering.

She moved about among the other guests of Lady Hindford with an easy manner that delighted all; the younger members of the party discovered that she could be as youthful as they, and they marvelled at the merry twinkle that passed over those usually serious eyes, while the older ones enjoyed her society just as much and found that she could converse entertainingly on subjects fitted for riper years.

Men and women alike admitted that she was a charming woman, and rather lazily wondered why she had not secured an eligible partner long ago.

"Miss Meredith!"

The name was uttered in a tone of surprise.

"Mr. Atherton!"

In this case the tone was slightly sarcastic, and a malicious gleam appeared in Miss Meredith's eyes. A mocking glance was directed at him.

"How strange that we should meet again here, is it not?" she asked. "This was where we last met, you remember, Mr. Atherton; or perhaps you do not remember? It is so long ago!"

"Was it really here?" he asked, his eyebrows slightly lifted in surprise. Then, as he observed the curl of the lips, he hastened to add: "Yes, of course it was!"

He was nettled at having betrayed his forgetfulness, and he fancied that he had easily undone the blunder by his last remark.

She laughed.

"I ought to feel flattered by your recollecting anything about me! And you really did recognise me after a round dozen of years, Mr. Atherton? Eighteen plus twelve, that is thirty! Yet there was no good reason why you should remember me, was there?"

He avoided the question.

"Oh, it all comes back to me very vividly now!" he rejoined uneasily. "We talked and walked about, and you wore something white and—and—yes, you had a flower in your hair!" He looked relieved; this woman was so entrancingly beautiful and he was glad to retrieve his character by remembering something.

"That is a very graphic description of me and of our doings," she laughed. "I recollect more than that about that evening, and about other occasions, but that is probably because I was young—eighteen, you see!—and impressions sink deeper into one's inner consciousness at eighteen than at twenty-seven.

"You were half as old again as I was then, but twelve years added to both totals make a difference in the disparity of age, do they not?

"Yes, I was eighteen, and I wore a rose in my hair; now I am thirty and the rose has given place to gold and that is worn on my dress, not in my hair. Very symbolical, is it not? Youth and rose-colour—youth sees everything rose-coloured! Age and pale-gold; that is expressive of more sober and more solid ideas!"

They had walked unconsciously together to an ottoman and he had listened uncomfortably to this speech without daring to interrupt. Memory was asserting itself, and the "other occasions" became more clear; he compared the other occasions with that evening when they last met, and he felt awkward.

"It is so pleasant to recall old times, Mr. Atherton, that you ought to be ever so grateful to me for giving you the opportunity!" she said with pretended earnestness. "I should like to hear your version of that far-away evening, to see if it coincides with mine!"

He was doubtful about the earnestness of the first portion of this remark, but there was a suspicious wavering about the concluding words that made him catch at the chance they offered.

"Youthful impressions are not always correct, Miss Meredith, and things are not invariably what they seem! If, as I fancy, there was something during that evening which—which seemed to jar, it may have been a wrong impression!"

He was conscious that his pleading was not clever; it might even have damaged his case; yet he cherished the hope that it had been successful.

"Come now! I fear your recollection is not so vivid as you suppose it to be, Mr. Atherton!" she retorted with a quiet smile. "Was it with me or with someone else that you 'walked and talked' so much on that occasion?"

He leant back to hide the embarrassment that was showing plainly in his face. He wanted to get away, but the old fascination had been reawakened and intensified by the meeting with this superb woman and he could not move. Nay, he was irresistibly drawn nearer to her, as the moth to the flame.

"Shall we saunter through the rooms, Miss Meredith?" he asked, again ignoring her question.

"No, it is pleasant here!" she responded, and the sarcastic tone gave place to one of yearning for a moment. "Let me beguile the time by telling a story. I used to be a dreamer in the old days and fond of weaving such fabrics. Those had reference to the future—castles in the air, they might have been called. This one will have reference to past time."

It was a cosy corner and they were not likely to be disturbed. She sat with her hands in her lap, toying—sometimes idly, sometimes nervously—with her fan; her head was inclined and her eyes fixed with a distant expression on the floor a yard or so in front, as though studying the pattern and trying to compare it with another that she had seen.

"There was a girl," she began in a soft voice, full of sad tenderness—"a girl of eighteen. She was of a warm, not to say passionate disposition; sensitive to a degree and full of trust and confidence in her fellow-creatures.

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"At eighteen a girl is susceptible to the tender passion to a far greater degree than a youth, despite the fact that we hear of 'lad's love.' This girl 'came out,' and, being pretty, was the object of much admiration.

"Being of a simple, trustful nature, she failed to understand some of this attention; she was a devotee of the cult called hero-worship; she admired the noble and was ready to fall down, figuratively, and worship the man who should nearest resemble her ideal. She was foolish, of course!"

The tone changed to one of flippancy and Atherton started. Before he could speak, Irene Meredith continued:

"One day she met this man. He was older than her by nine years, as she afterwards discovered, but that was a matter of small moment. He seemed to her to be the man for whom her young soul had been longing; he appeared to represent all that was good and noble. He was her ideal, her hero, come at last.

"She worshipped him from afar, and then he approached her. It was like the sun drawing near and dazzling her; all the secret fear of expectancy was melted, her heart grew light—so light that it tried to lift the girl above earth. She was glad, happy, for *he*, her hero, had come to her!

"This hero spoke soft words to her, and the trustful girl believed that they came from his soul. They entered *her* soul, and her love was satisfied. She gave her whole being to him; he loved her, for did he not continually seek her and say those sweet things to her—the sweet things that are so dear to a woman in love?

"So she believed, and was enchanted; she lived in a fool's paradise, for she did not understand the ways of some men, who can amuse themselves with a girl's heart and then throw it aside."

"Perhaps the girl was mistaken!" interrupted Atherton eagerly. "She may have thought that a few commonplaces were intended for love speeches."

"She was not mistaken in that!" returned Irene Meredith bitterly. "There are men and women who will deal with the hearts of others as though they were senseless toys. He spoke words of love to the girl, I say! And she suffered.

"So the days passed, and then came the evening of Lady Hindford's great social function. The girl looked forward to it with a pleasure so keen that it resembled pain. She felt her breath coming in quick gasps as he approached her; but oh, the misery that enshrouded her a few seconds later!

"He muttered some commonplaces and left her. She knew the differences between commonplaces and the honeyed words he had spoken before!

"With a pain at her heart that seemed like to kill her, she watched him by the side of the lovely Sybil Barran; she saw him whispering to Sybil as he had whispered to her, but probably Sybil was not a hero worshipper, and she did not care!

"The girl waited, waited for him to return, but he did not seek her again. With a sentiment of numbness the girl went home and——"

Irene Meredith drew a deep breath.

"That part of the story is vague. I know that the girl passed the night kneeling by the side of her bed, her face buried in her hands on the coverlet, sobbing, sobbing!"

"As you—I mean the girl—did not know exactly what happened," said Atherton slowly, his face white and haggard, "it is possible that she did not suffer like that!"

"She did!" cried Irene fiercely, and Atherton shrank before this vehemence. "I think," continued Irene more calmly, after a pause, "that the girl died that night.

"The next scene in the story shows a figure that is girlish, but with a face that indicates the woman, and behind that face were the feelings of a woman.

"The girl had passed through the experience that changes from one state to another; she had learnt that her hero was only mere clay, after all, and worse clay than many, for he amused himself by toying with a heart and then threw it away.

"The experience embittered her, but she gradually recovered. In spite of herself, she——" Irene stopped abruptly; she had said more than she intended. "This is the story; what do you think of it?" she asked, half defiantly.

Atherton drew a deep breath.

"Perhaps the man was in reality more than mere clay. Perhaps he suffered more than, or as much as, the girl did. Suppose that he was dazzled by another light, a light which, like the will-o'-the-wisp, led him astray without his knowing it. Suppose——"

"That is rather difficult to imagine, is it not?" she inquired scornfully. "The marsh light does not dazzle, and a man would hardly leave a bright light to follow that. It demonstrates the truth of the girl's notion; he was playing, and——"

It was his turn to interrupt now.

"Hear my story," he pleaded, and she let him go on.

"Suppose that the man was as the girl thought, let us go even so far as that. Imagine his feelings when, years afterwards, he realised what he had lost!

"He met the girl, and found her more lovely, more worthy to be loved than she had ever been before, and there arose within him an awakened love, a flame that developed from a spark of recollection into a fierce flame of present love, all-consuming, all-absorbing! How he hated himself for having been so blind in the past, and now he begged for forgiveness!

"With the fuller knowledge gained in those twelve years he recognised how priceless is the love of a good woman, and he would have done everthing to win it. The man wonders whether there is any hope for him?"

It was a passionate appeal. He waited breathlessly for the answer. Irene maintained the fiction of the story, which she had adopted and he had followed. A great struggle had been going on within her while he was speaking; her bosom heaved and her breath came hard, but she was calmer now.

"The girl says it is impossible to alter the past," she said decisively. "The love which the man offers is a sudden impulse, and may die out as rapidly as it arose.

"All these years he has not thought of her or he would have sought her and have tried to make amends. Yet she has all through retained a faint hope that her hero was a hero after all, although she knew not how the fact could be demonstrated.

"Yes, she will admit it! She has lived with an undefined, secret hope that she was mistaken. They met, and the man proved that he retained nothing of the past, and so her faint spark went out! The man offered the love of to-day, whereas the girl was looking for the love of yesterday, only to find that it had never existed, and that her worst fears were correct!"

Irene Meredith rose. She was smiling with the mocking expression of a few minutes previous.

"Come," she said, jestingly, "we have had our own private theatricals; we must now go to witness those provided by others for our edification!"

"I cannot go without one final appeal!" cried Randall Atherton desperately. "I was a fool, but should a man's folly be punished all through his life, even when he sees and admits the fault? Irene, tell me that you will try to love me! Do not send me away from you, for I cannot be happy now without you! Do not be hard! As you are beautiful, enchanting, so be merciful! May I not hope?"

Oh, the irony of Fate! The man who has trifled with her young heart was now pleading for the love that was given to him so freely years before and cast aside! Irene shook her head.

"The idol is shattered!" she said coldly. "Let it rest, let us both forget! The man I loved was twelve years younger than you are! I could not love you! That man is dead, as is the girl! Come, or we shall be late!"

On the following morning Irene Meredith sat at the table with her writing case in front of her. She had arrived home late, but she had slept well, and her face was tranquil in its expression.

"Yes, I can give Cyril his answer now!" she murmured. "I feared that something of the past might remain to make us both unhappy, but that is gone now. I can honestly tell Cyril that he may marry me whenever he likes!"

**F. Brewster.**

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# HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA.

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

**LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS.** A widow, who, having lost all her money in a bank failure, undertakes to chaperon Belinda.

**BELINDA NORTH.** The beautiful daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire.

**DUKE OF EASTACRES.** A comparatively penniless suitor for Belinda's hand.

**DAVID CARR.** A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.

**LADY HONORIA.** Sister of the Duke of Eastacres.

**STANLEY FORBES.** A famous barrister.

**ALPHONSE HERVE.** An eminent French artist in love with Belinda.

**CRAWLEY DAVENANT.** An old friend of Lady Peggy.

## I Make My Last Bid for £20,000.

It was no use wasting time in anger on Honoria; that could come later. I turned my attention to Belinda, who was gazing with horror-stricken eyes at the Duke.

"My pearls!" she cried suddenly, lifting her hand to her throat. "My pearls! I have lost them, my father's gift, *here*"—she glanced round the salon with a shudder—"to that man!"

"Here are your pearls, Belinda," I said, snatching them from the table. "The Duke was only in fun, he did not mean to keep them. There is nothing to make a fuss about!"

"*Nothing!*" she repeated dully.

Then, with a sudden flush of passion, she threw the pearls upon the floor, and stamped upon them viciously.

"I can never wear them again," she said. "He has touched them, they have become vile!" and she ground the pearls into powder under her feet.

"What I have done with my necklace, you have tried to do with me," she said. "You would have destroyed all truth, all purity of mind and purpose in me. You would have staked my soul as carelessly, as callously as I my beads. You would have given me into the possession of that man, have set me in the mud for him to trample under foot.

"Why should you wish to wrong me, why should you try to wreck my life, to break my heart, to perjure my soul? Have you no pity, no softness?" She came close to me, her eyes, unnaturally bright, burnt into mine, her hands, hot and feverish, grasped my own.

"You have parted me from the man I love!" she cried. "You have taken the brightness from my life, you have weakened my will, you have taken my strength. But, while I live, I swear—*I swear* that man shall never touch me!"

For a moment she stood tall, strong, defiant in her youth and beauty; the next she weakened, raised her hands to her head, gazed round bewildered, with a little helpless cry.

"My head," she said, "I—I——" She glanced round as if to seek protection. I hastened to her side, but, with an unlooked-for courage, Honoria stepped between me and my charge.

Winding her thin arms about the girl, she drew her close, and murmured loving words. Think of it! This weak, this most contemptible of creatures, gathered Belinda to her heart like a frightened child and stood defiant—she, who had never dared call her soul her own!

Never shall I forget the scene. The salon, brilliantly lit, gorgeous with gleaming marbles and rich hangings, and, in the midst of all the luxury, the centre of the feverish excitement, stood Belinda, beautiful exceedingly, her fair hair dishevelled, her young face distressed, clinging, aye, clinging, to the woman with the lean figure, the ill-fitting gown, the foolish face—to Honoria!

I motioned to Eastacres to leave the place; with a struggle he accepted the inevitable and disappeared. Honoria and I—chiefly Honoria—induced Belinda to come from the Casino to the hotel. She was in a high state of fever, and I had to administer a double dose of opium before I got her quiet. I left her sleeping soundly, and turned my attention to Honoria.

Before I could open upon her she commenced to weep in her old, abject, disjointed sort of fashion. Would I forgive her this once? She had obeyed me implicitly, carried out all my instructions in regard to Belinda, had posted no letters without bringing them to me, sent no telegrams without my permission.

"Look," she added, "here are three letters Belinda gave me two days ago—to Stanley Forbes, her father, and to Lady Farringdon." I took them from her eagerly, and glanced, half relenting, at her face, red and disfigured from her tears.

"So long as Eastacres isn't here or anywhere near, I will do all you tell me, Lady Peggy. I know you are fond of Belinda and wish to make her happy. But Eastacres," she shuddered, "he is a bad man, a cruel man, worse than anyone I know, worse even than Mark!" She clenched her hands and her features worked convulsively.

"Keep Eastacres away, Lady Peggy," she repeated, "and I'll do all you wish. I'll watch over Belinda, keep her quiet, give her medicine, bring you her letters. *Everything*, but," she clutched my arm, "don't send me away," she moaned, "*don't*, don't send me away."

Truth to tell, I could not, at that moment, have well spared her.

Belinda had of late evinced a strange dislike for me. She had refused on more than one occasion to take her sleeping draught, and I had had to rely on Honoria to induce her to do so.

That Honoria was in the main faithful to the trust I reposed in her was proved by her bringing me the letters Belinda had given to be posted. There was nothing much in any of the letters. She said she was not well, and that she longed for

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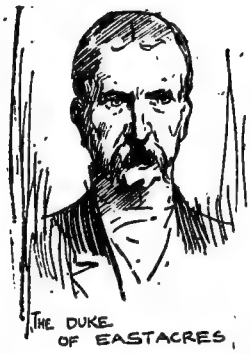
THE DUKE OF EASTACRES.

the spring. No more; but Honoria was not to know that. Her intentions were perfectly good.

As matters stood, it was evident that if I could assure her that I had no desire to force Belinda into marriage with Eastacres, convince her, in fact, that I wished to get rid of him, Honoria would be a safe ally.

I decided to take her apparently into my confidence.

"Honoria," I said, "can I trust you?

"If I tell you of my hopes and plans for Belinda, will you swear not to break confidence; will you swear not to let out a word?"

She nodded, dried her tears, and tried to look sensible.

"Very well," I said. "I believe you, and I will trust you. I don't want Belinda to marry your brother, I gave up that idea a long time ago. I only want her to be happy. But Eastacres, as you know, is a very determined man. He has made up his mind that, come what may, he will win Belinda for his wife.

"Her father, as you know, sanctions the match, and Belinda, at one time, was not averse to it. I cannot break with Eastacres openly. At one time I was his friend, and if I seem to turn against him he will not forgive me. You know what an enemy he can be?"

She shuddered and hid her face.

"As I tell you, I don't mean him to marry Belinda, but he must not suspect it. I shall tell him we are leaving here for Mentone, and that he had better precede us. In reality, as you know, we are going to Rome, where I shall hand over Belinda to her father's care. He, not I, will have the responsibility of settling her love affairs in future."

"Do you really mean it, Lady Peggy, do you really mean it?" she gasped.

"Of course I do. I shall be only too glad to get her off my hands. She's been a terrible care to me. Meantime, you must not say a word of this to Belinda. She's so impulsive that she will tell somebody or other that I have sent Eastacres away, it will gradually work back to him, and then——" I gave a little shiver and looked tragic.

"Belinda shan't hear a word from me," she said. "So long as Eastacres doesn't worry her, she won't ask any questions. I'll do just as you tell me, Lady Peggy, and thank you very much."

I dismissed her much relieved, and lay down for an hour or two's sleep. There was much to be done in the morning. I should have to be up betimes.

I was up and dressed by nine o'clock next day waiting to see the Duke. He came in answer to my note at once, and remained till after eleven.

We had many things to discuss, much to arrange. I was mapping out the details of the scheme by which I should make sure of the £20,000 promised to me on Belinda's marriage. It was a bold scheme, and, with care and caution, must succeed.

"Eastacres," I said gravely, "before we go further into this business, you must assure me of your good faith. Will you bind yourself to act as we decide this morning, not to run foolish and unnecessary risks such as last night? Above all, will you promise not to approach Belinda till I give the word? The whole success of the scheme depends on this, that you disappear from view, and neither speak to her, nor see her, until"—I paused—"until the moment when you claim her as your wife. Only on these conditions do I carry the matter through."

"I agree," he said sullenly. "I can't manage the thing by myself, that's evident, at any rate while that confounded Honoria is about. Why don't you send the woman off, confound her?"

"I can't manage Belinda without her assistance. I have explained that already."

He laughed in a sneering, contemptuous sort of fashion that made my blood boil.

"Stop that," I cried indignantly. "Stop, I say, or I will——"

"What will you do?" he said. "What can you do? You're at your last gasp, fighting for dear life to keep your head up in the world. Do you suppose I haven't made myself acquainted with your circumstances? That old fool Crawley let it all out to me one night. He told me that you hadn't a penny, and that unless you got Belinda off your hands you'd be in the workhouse, or—or prison," he added malignantly, "it's a toss up which."

For a moment I could not speak, rage and indignation choked me. That I—*that I* should be spoken to like this!

"Go!" I said, storming at him. "Go at once! I will have no more to do with you. I——"

He cut me short with a gesture of contempt.

"You can do nothing," he said, "*nothing*. If you back out of this affair, I shall cable to Hardy North, and I shall tell him enough of you and your history to make him fetch his daughter home at once. You've one chance, and one only, of winning this deal. I'm that chance, you know it, without me you're lost. And so," he scowled, "keep a civil tongue or I'll cry off the business altogether."

I could not contend with him. I was not so strong as I had been, and his insolence seemed to shatter my nerves. I collapsed into a chair and pointed to the bell.

"Brandy," I said feebly, and waited like a dead thing till the *garçon* reappeared with the stimulant.

When I had swallowed the cognac I felt better.

"Now," I said calmly, "if you can speak without sneering and insulting me, I will hear what you have to say. Do you promise to keep out of Belinda's way?"

He nodded.

"Yes," he said, "that's settled, now get to business."

Long and earnestly we discussed, and at last we had arranged the scheme that was to bring about such great results.

"We leave Monte Carlo in a few days," I said, "arriving in Rome the beginning of December. Belinda will go for a drive most afternoons in the Corso. She will, as a rule, be accompanied by Honoria. On the afternoon that you see *me* lean from the carriage and drop a bunch of violets on the ground, you will know that is the day appointed, and," I glanced at him fixedly, "you will have everything in readiness."

He nodded, and turned towards the window.

"I cannot say how soon it will be after we arrive in Rome," I said, dropping my voice. "It will, as you know, depend on circumstances. But remember this. You must be prepared on any day to—to——"

"Pick up the bunch of violets, Lady Peggy?" he said grimly.

He turned as he spoke and made me a low bow and left the apartment.

We did not leave Monte Carlo so soon as I anticipated. Belinda fell into a sort of low fever and had to remain in bed. I did not send for a doctor. I had reliance on the remedies prescribed by the old man in Russia, and in a week or so she rallied.

We arrived in Rome on a clear, beautiful afternoon. The air was crisp and held a touch of winter, but it was fresh and exhilarating on the Campagna.

I had arranged to stay in the palace where in the old days I had a suite of rooms ready at any moment for my occupation. Belinda seemed brighter than I had known her for some time, and insisted on a tour of inspection the next day.

Willing to humour her, I ordered the carriage—the Duc di Rocca had placed his stables at our disposal—and to her great delight we set out to see the City of the Seven Hills. It was an exquisite morning. The Corso—Rome's fashionable thoroughfare—was crowded with pedestrians, elegant equipages, whose occupants shook hands with the promenaders on either side.

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So great was the number of vehicles that both lines were absolutely unbroken; the coachmen could do no more than walk their horses. All Rome—worth knowing—gathered together in the smallest possible space—the Corso is not so wide as Bond Street—talking, laughing, chatting, as in a friendly drawing-room.

Belinda created a stir with her big eyes and exquisite pallor, but she was too cold for the taste of the Romans. They like a more volcanic beauty—poor Vera they worshipped.

From the Corso we passed through Piazza del Popolo—the square of the people—white and dazzling in the sunshine. Everything amused and interested the girl, and she cried out like a child at the sight of the gigantic shaft of marble gilt with the sun's rays—the Column of Trajan.

The Romans themselves—I speak of the old families—regard the enthusiasm of the English and the foreigners generally for the city as a little childish. For them the Corso, with its scandals, intrigues, and pretty women, and for all in it they search, is the only Rome worth knowing.

One gets into their way of regarding things. During the many months I had spent in Rome I had seen less than Belinda in her youthful enthusiasm got through in a week.

Her enthusiasm left her as suddenly as it had kindled. She became moody, depressed, not even the approach of Christmas could rouse her. Worse than any of these things, she became more and more irritable, and her dislike of me came back in full force.

I increased the opium daily—I had been decreasing it of late—and waited anxiously for results. Each afternoon we drove through the Corso. Sometimes the three of us, at others Belinda and Honoria—never Belinda and I alone. Things were not yet ripe for that. Each day I cast a furtive glance to where, hidden in an angle of the Palazza Brandini, a fair, slight man watched and waited for our coming.

One afternoon he was not there. It wanted but a week to Christmas, and I was excessively anxious. Hardy North had shown signs of relenting, and had written that he would be with us at the New Year. By that time I hoped to be in possession of his cheque and have Belinda off my hands.

That night Eastacres came to the Palace. I saw him from the window and stole down to meet him in the great courtyard.

"How much longer?" he said impatiently.

"I like delay as little as you, Eastacres."

"Well," he said roughly, "I can wait no longer. The third day from now, that is the last minute!" And despite myself I shuddered.

"You remember the route?" I asked. "You meet the carriage outside Rome, at the little inn where you and I and Carstairs used to breakfast—how long ago!"

He nodded, and drew closer; the shadow of the night enveloped us.

"You change horses and coachman there," he whispered, "and take the road that leads to Acqueto. Three hours' drive will bring you to the Chapel. I shall be there."

"I cannot say which day, Eastacres, but one of the next three—we shall also be there," I murmured.

As I passed up the staircase it seemed to me I heard the rustle of skirts entering the room above—my own. When I looked in no one was there, however, but the two girls. Belinda was asleep, and Honoria the picture of misery with a bad headache.

The incident disquieted me as did something else the following day. I met Honoria creeping up the Palace stairs early—before eight.

"I've been to get some flowers," she stammered, and held up a bunch of violets.

I glanced at her sharply, I could have vowed I saw a letter in her hand; but the vacant stare with which she regarded me caused me such irritation that I angrily dismissed her.

That afternoon I received a telegram I had been waiting for. It ran as follows:

"I shall be in Rome to-morrow as arranged.—Mark Striven."

I gave a sigh of relief, and calling my dear Honoria, propounded my scheme to give her pleasure and Belinda joy!

"Belinda's father is coming to-morrow, dear," I said. "I've just had a wire from him. I fancy," I smiled facetiously, "that someone else is likely to arrive to-morrow also—a friend, a dear friend of Belinda's."

To my astonishment Honoria's face grew ghastly. For a moment I thought that she was going to faint.

"Do you mean David Carr?" she asked, with a terrified glance at the door.

"We won't mention names, Honoria, for fear of disappointment. Anyway, in case the friend should come I want you to be here to receive him. Belinda and I will be gone to the station to meet Mr. North at the time he may be here. I shall trust to you to entertain him till we return."

"To-morrow!" she repeated. "I—I——" And then to my astonishment the foolish woman broke into tears. "It's my head," she said—"my head. I think I'll go and rest a bit."

She went out of the room crying and, I could see, distressed. Now what could it matter to Honoria whether Belinda's father—and the friend—arrived the next day or the day after? I puzzled over the problem, but dismissed it as too trivial. That is the worst of dealing with an idiot like Honoria, you never know when to suspect them.

In the course of the day, however, her ladyship recovered her spirits. She was under a solemn promise to reveal nothing to Belinda, but had not the girl been very dazed and sleepy from the drug she would, I am sure, have guessed something was in the air.

Honoria laughed and joked—rather tried to joke—in a way that was absurd to witness. The poor fool imagined that that time to-morrow she would be entertaining Carr, and that Belinda, her beloved Belinda, would be clasped in her father's arms.

If she had only known that Mark Striven was the man she had to entertain the following afternoon—Mark, who was to take her then and there to Paris, to that house in the Rue Burgoyne, safely out of the way.

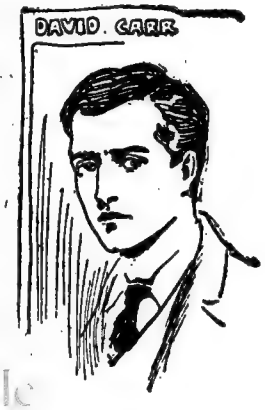
The next morning Belinda slept late; we roused her with difficulty at lunch-time and induced her to take a little food. She was quite dull and apathetic; wanted to go to sleep and feebly resisted Honoria's efforts to dress her. Time was going on, and, feverishly impatient, I came to offer my assistance. At the sight of me the girl commenced to cry in a whimpering sort of fashion that maddened me.

"Go downstairs, Honoria," I said. "I'll dress Belinda."

She screamed out as Honoria left the room, but I cared little for her screams. I had a long account to settle with Belinda; she should learn once and for all I was to be obeyed.

I stopped her cries, shook her into acquiescence, and hurried on her clothes. A long, dark cloak was the first thing I laid my hands on in the way of an outdoor garment; that, and a black hat pulled low over her eyes, and a thick veil, completed her costume. The girl looked ghastly indeed, and I did not care for her to be remarked on.

As a last thought I wound a fleecy shawl about her neck and shoulders.




She sat, a strange, dull-looking figure in the chair where I had placed her. Something—what, I can't say—conjured before my eyes the vision of Belinda as I'd seen her first. A tall, straight slip of a girl, with the face of a Greek goddess and the figure of a wood nymph; not much of the wood nymph in that apathetic face and figure!

I laughed as I looked at her—a hard, bitter laugh. She should not have set her will against mine, defied me, made light of me, *beggared* me of my future.

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And yet——I went back to the figure and laid my hand upon her shoulder.

"Belinda," I said, her listlessness frightened me.

Through the dark veil her eyes stared at me, dull, apathetic, indifferent. I turned from her room into Honoria's, a smaller chamber opening out of it.

"Belinda's not well to-day," I said to Honoria. "She seems to have a slight return of fever. I half think she ought to stay at home. Still, Mr. North will be so disappointed that I think I'll risk it. It's getting on for three o'clock." I glanced at my watch. "It's five minutes past," I said. "I had no idea it was so late."

Time had gone quicker than I thought; Belinda's obstinacy had hindered me. I could risk no further delay, it was imperative we should start at once.

"I'll get ready while you take Belinda down, Honoria. Just put her in the carriage, that's all, you needn't stop."

I laid emphasis on the last direction. It was possible Mark Striven, with his usual cunning, might put in an appearance before the hour named, in which case it was not advisable Honoria should meet him in the street. It might cause a scene and lead to unpleasant explanations.

"Very well, Lady Peggy," she answered. "I shall lie down when you're gone, my head's so bad!" She raised her face as she spoke. I could tell she was suffering, and felt a twinge of compunction at the thought of her forthcoming interview with Mark. Still, it was none of my business, I had always treated Honoria with kindness.

I went up to my room on the next floor and hurriedly commenced to dress for my journey. I could hear voices coming from the room beneath, and once I thought I heard Belinda cry. I judged it best to leave her to Honoria, however, and continued my preparations.

My boxes, corded and packed, stood in the corner, addressed to me at the Hotel du Nord, Paris. My jewellery and valuables were in my dressing-bag. I had dismissed my maid some few months back. Her presence would have rendered my scheme difficult to carry out.

With a last look round the apartment I went to the door.

My heart beat fast, I felt the blood rush through my veins with the force, the tumult of my triumph! At last, at last the goal was in sight, the prize at hand!

I had fought hard for the money that was to keep my old age free from poverty; again, and yet again, I had plotted and planned to win it, plotted and planned in vain. Now there was no chance of losing it.

To-morrow, to-morrow I should cable the news to Hardy North that would bring me £20,000! Within a week I should be back in Paris, dear, delightful Paris, my future assured, my troubles over, my days as a chaperon at an end, and Belinda—Belinda would be off my hands!

I looked in at Honoria's room as I came down. The shutters of the window were closed, and she was lying on the bed. I did not disturb her—the poor thing, I thought, might as well enjoy what peace she could. She'd have little enough when Mark Striven came.

Down the stairs and through the courtyard I went, murmured directions to the coachman, and took my seat beside Belinda. She had drawn the white shawl tightly round her and seemed very cold. I wrapped a rug about her knees and offered her brandy.

She shook her head, through the dark veil her face looked white and shadowy. Her eyes were closed, her features, blurred under the thick net, sharp and careworn. I turned my head away and looked out of the window.

We drove rapidly, past splendid buildings, side by side with mean hovels, stately palaces and churches within a stone's throw of mean streets and noisome slums. Past the Jesu Church, one of the most beautiful in Rome, past the wonderful gardens of the Quirinal—the King's palace, odorous with pines centuries old. Past St. Peter's, and the terrace where the band plays of an evening and the fashionable loiterers congregate to see the sunset.

As we turned up the Corso I grasped the bunch of violets that I carried, and with a nervous tremor I could not conquer flung them through the window on the road. A moment and the slight figure of the Duke stepped forward.

He lifted the flowers, glanced with a swift and evil smile towards the carriage, and disappeared in the crowd. From there until we reached the little inn some miles beyond Rome we drove in silence. Belinda, in her corner opposite me, slept, so still, so white she looked that I grew fearful and laid my fingers on her pulse. It beat quickly but distinctly. I sat back reassured.

We changed horses as arranged at the little hostelry, and I sent back Di Rocca's coachman with a bonus large enough to stop him asking inconvenient questions. All the time Belinda drowsed, curled up in the corner, dull, apathetic, motionless.

The Chapel where we were to meet the Duke was one of those wayside places of worship one constantly comes across in Italy. Mass was solemnised by an ignorant priest little better than a peasant, who lived in a cottage near the Chapel. Eastacres had arranged he should perform the marriage ceremony.

Eastacres was himself a Catholic, and the fact that Belinda was a Protestant could easily be got over. Under the influence of opium she would be sure to go through the ceremony, too apathetic to realise what was happening. The marriage would be legal. Against her will Belinda would be made Duchess of Eastacres, Hardy North would be triumphant—and I—I should have £20,000!

The road which led up to the mountains was uneven, we jolted over stones perpetually, and more than once I feared we were upset. We kept up our pace, however, and arrived without mishap at the Chapel just after six.

Eastacres had passed us on the road, he was talking to the priest as we drew up. I got out first and hastened to meet him.

"Is everything ready?" I asked.

"Nearly," he returned. "Bring Belinda into the sacristy. Then when the priest is ready to commence you can take her straight to the altar."

I motioned to the coachman and moved towards the Chapel. He paused close to a door in the wall that opened into the room that served for what we should call a vestry.

The evening was fine and light and the glory of the day still lingered in the sky; the white road up which we had just come stretched like a ribbon, winding in and out the hills. Immediately below us, the road dipped lying on a level for some way.

"Look, Eastacres," I cried, pointing to the straight stretch. "Look——" A horseman was urging his steed to the utmost along the road. His figure stood out against the background of the hills.

"It's—it's—*Carr!*" I screamed and clutched Eastacres tightly. "Ah, I see it now. Honoria, your sister, stole the medal, the bronze medal that David gave Belinda. She was to send it to him as a token when she was in danger and distress. I took it from her, meaning to throw it away, but in the night it was stolen from me, stolen by Honoria, and she has sent it to him, to David Carr, and he is here, *here!*" I shrieked, and pointed to the horseman rapidly drawing nearer.

"Calm yourself," said Eastacres, "he cannot reach here under twelve minutes. By then it will be too late."

He turned on his heel and entered the Chapel. Meanwhile, shaking Belinda by the arm, I tried to rouse her. She woke up after a while and followed me submissively into the sacristy. When there, however, she persisted in standing by the door, her back to me, her face turned to the white road, the road up which David was spurring for dear life.

I wrung my hands in an agony. Would that dull priest never have finished his droning? Would Eastacres never give the sign for us to come?

At last, pale and anxious, but composed, he appeared at the door which opened into the Chapel, and signed to us to enter.

"Come, Belinda," I said sharply, and turned to help her take off her veil.

She shook me off, fumbled over the fastening for a moment,

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then; with a quick movement, turned round and faced us both.

And as I looked I felt the blood within me turn to ice. For it was not Belinda! My God! Not Belinda, but Honoria, who stood before me!

She, the idiot, the fool, had tricked me, tricked a clever woman of the world, who had held her in such utter and supreme contempt as something only to be tortured, harried, laughed at and despised.

Oh, my God! it was too much! She had placed Belinda in her bed, and muffling herself in the girl's clothes, had sat dazed and stupefied at her own courage, daring the journey, though she had heard my talk with Eastacres.

I could have killed her in my rage, and stepped forward, shaking with passion.

But Eastacres was before me. Lifting his arm, with his full strength he struck her face, her head, struck her again and yet again until she lay a quivering heap upon the floor.

"And now," he said, "there's you to settle with, you, the smart woman who was cheated by a fool."

God knows what he meant to do. There was murder in his face, murder in his heart. The priest long since had fled in terror from the place. There was no one——.

A tall figure strode between me and the Duke. A turn of the wrist, a movement of the powerful arm, and Eastacres was writhing in the grasp of David Carr.

He took him outside, and for the next ten minutes I listened to the shrieks of a man in horrible physical pain. David was flogging him. The lash of his riding whip sounded like a flail in the keen air. It was awful to hear—awful to see. The room grew misty before my eyes, my heart was galloping; somewhere, somewhere in the distance I seemed to hear the words "You'll never get the twenty thousand now. You'll never, never——" With a hoarse cry I threw up my arms. It was over, done with—I was beaten.

* * * * * *

I should like to have ended this series with these last words. The bitterness of failure is made yet more bitter knowing as I do that not one of you that read but will rejoice. I am compelled, however, in accordance with the conditions under which I wrote these articles to furnish the following facts.

Belinda recovered from the effects of the opium I had administered, and with her father's sanction married David some six months later. The young man is doing well in his profession, and I believe some hopes are entertained that in course of time he'll receive a title; so will Hardy North's ambition be partially gratified.

Honoria never went back to Mark Striven. That astute scoundrel made terms with North, and promised certain information—about me—in return for a lump sum, and gave an undertaking not to molest his wife. Honoria lives to this day with David and Belinda, as idiotic, foolish, and deceitful as ever. She was always ungrateful, and will doubtless serve Belinda as she served me.

Hardy North declined to pay me a penny for my care of his daughter, and threatened what he called "proceedings" if I ever broached the subject again.

Eastacres has left the country. Stanley Forbes gave him his choice of prosecution for forgery—he'd been imitating people's signatures—or voluntary exile.

He chose the latter. His mother, the old Duchess, still lives, and is doubtless as confirmed a kleptomaniac as when she stole Belinda's pearls. Crawley is the only one of the old set I ever see, and even he has forsaken me of late.

But I don't want them. I hate and despise them all. Not one among them but would have acted as I acted, struggled as I struggled, not one but would have welcomed and have fawned upon me had I been successful.

As it is I have my revenge. Of the people mentioned in this series all but two are living. You can identify—with very little trouble—the prototypes of the women and the men—their doings, their faults, their foibles and the dark secrets of their lives set forth in the account of

HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA.

# Nearly a Tragedy.

### A Story in Three Chapters.

## CHAPTER I.

George Beswick, a young sailor on his Majesty's ship *Marquess of Hartington*, had served a long apprenticeship to the sea, and at length, after being in many climes and passing through many hardships, he found himself a full-blown A.B. He had set his heart upon this kind of life work, and got on very well until a blight fell on his career.

## CHAPTER II.

One of his duties was to go aloft, and he began to find that when at the topmast head he would be attacked with dizziness, until he had a regular fear of climbing. When sailing in a high sea he had a peculiar swimming sensation in his head, and the vessel seemed to be spinning round. He also had an intense burning sensation in the stomach. It might have been thought that this was sea-sickness; but it was not. It was simply chronic biliousness.

The medicine chest was brought into requisition without any effect. The burning sensation in the stomach became gradually more severe, and lasted for longer spells. He had dreadful pains in his head, and also in his joints, and even on shore had attacks of faintness and blurred sight. His food seemed to do him no good, and after each meal he felt heavy and exhausted. Walking became painful, and, no matter how careful he was as to what he ate, he was subject to continuous constipation.

When he put into port he used to see doctors, but they were unable to do him good; until, in addition to the daily risks he was running when up aloft, he began to fear he would have to give up the sea altogether, which was a serious matter for him after having served his apprenticeship to it.

## CHAPTER III.

Reduced to such a plight, he was considering what he would do to gain a livelihood ashore, when a friend insisted on his trying bile beans for biliousness. This friend told him that for biliousness, dizziness, headache, constipation and its accompaniments, there was nothing like bile beans; so he got a box. Soon after he began the dull, heavy feeling left him, and for the first time for eighteen months he found himself free from constipation. He began to enjoy his food; and now, thanks solely to bile beans, he is entirely cured, and able to do his work well and vigorously. Bile beans cost one and three-halfpence and two and nine a box, of all chemists, or from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., Red Cross Street, London, E.C. Insist on seeing the name "Chas. Forde" on every box. In addition to the ailments mentioned above, they are a certain cure for indigestion, liver and kidney troubles, piles, anæmia, and all female ailments, colds, chill, rheumatism, and influenza. It was a London *Sun* reporter who gleaned this story, and he learned it from George Beswick himself.

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### Hard on the Artist.

She: "I wonder why they hung that picture?" He: "Perhaps they couldn't catch the artist."

### Just as Easy.

She: "Do you think there is any reason why a young lady should not ride a bicycle as well as drive a horse?" He: "Not at all. It's just as easy to dodge a bicycle as a carriage."

### She'd Tell All She Knew.

Lulu: "We girls are getting up a secret society of our own." George: "Indeed! What's the object?" Lulu: "I don't know yet, but I'll tell you all about it after I'm initiated."

### His Proper Sphere.

Author: "Mary, I've made a mistake in my calling. I'm not an author, but a born chemist." Author's wife: "What makes you think that, Horace?" Author: "Well, every book I write becomes a drug in the market."

### Couldn't Afford Such Extravagance.

"You are worth your weight in gold to me, darling!" he murmured. "Then do go home early, George, dear," she replied wearily. "I've lost ten pounds since we became engaged, just sitting up late with you. We can't afford such extravagance."

### Her Love Explained.

He: "If you did not love me, why did you encourage me?" She: "Encourage you?" He: "For two seasons you have accepted every one of my invitations to the theatre and concerts." She: "That was not because I loved you; it was because I loved the theatre."

### Wanted to Keep Him in the Family.

"Reginald," she said, to a wealthy young dandy, who had been paying his attentions to her, "I should like to ask you a very serious question." "What is it, my dear?" he replied. "Would you object to marry mamma if I refused you? You see, we really don't want to lose you."

### Rural Ignorance.

"Your trip to Italy must have been very pleasant," said one of the most intelligent young ladies in a Wiltshire village to Simpson, who had just returned from foreign parts. "Very interesting indeed," answered he. "Now, tell me," said she, "does Italy look like a boot? You know that's the way it looks on the map."

### What is Sisterly Love?

"Do I love George?" mused Clara softly, "or is it simply a sister's affection that I feel for——". Just then Bobby burst noisily into the room, and interrupted her sweet meditations. "Get, out of here, you young ruffian!" she shouted, and, seizing him by the arm, she shot him through the door. "Ah, no!" she sighed, as she resumed her interrupted train of thought, "my love for George is not a sister's love. It is something sweeter, purer, higher, and holier!"

### Very Probably He Would.

He (seriously): "Do you think your father would object to my marrying you?" She: "I don't know; if he's anything like me he would."

### An Old Hand at it.

"Miss Swift is learning to ride a bicycle, she tells me." "But she rode one last year. Why does she have to learn again?" "Another fellow is teaching her."

### The Meanings of Names.

Mother: "Every name means something—Harry, the bold; Charles, the brave; William, the good; Harold, the——" Helen (starting from a reverie): "Harold—oh, yes, Harold means business; he told me so last night."

### Not a Good Place.

Captain Ardare: "Just one kiss before I go, just one to soften the bitterness of parting." Miss Prudence: "Captain Ardare, I am pained by your request. I thought you knew I never permitted such liberties—besides, this isn't a good place."

### His Potent Virtue.

"Why does she consider her husband a model? He smokes, and is fond of wine?" "Yes." "Plays cards and scolds?" "So they say." "Never gets home till one?" "Yes, but——" "But what?" "He never gets a spot on the table-cloth when he carves."

### Strong Circumstantial Evidence.

"Young man, what right have you to kiss my daughter on such short acquaintance?" "What proof, sir, have you that I have done any such thing?" "No positive proof, young man, but that hairpin in your moustache is strong circumstantial evidence."

### Woman's Thoughtfulness.

"How lucky," said Mrs. Nuwed, "that I happened to pass that cigar sale this morning! These cigars are exactly the shade of George's new smoking jacket, and the smart little green bands round them will go with the lining beautifully. Men never think of these little things!"

### The Difference Age Makes.

A girl's taste differs according to her age, says a cynic. At sixteen she wants a masher with toothpick shoes and microscopic moustache; at twenty a nobleman with a pile of gold; at twenty-five, she'll be satisfied with a Member of Parliament; at thirty a country doctor or a curate will do, and at thirty-five anything in the male line, from an editor down.

### Waiting for Him to Go.

"Young man," said the stern parent, with the accent on the young, "do you intend to stay here all night holding my daughter's hand and looking her in the face like a sick calf?" "No, sir." "What do you intend to do, then?" "Well, I had thought when you did us the kindness to retire, I would put my arm round her waist, and if she did not object too forcibly, I might risk a kiss."

### Instinct or Experience?

"Maud," he said, as the carriage entered the shadowy lane, "Maud, are you sure you—you never had any man's arm about your waist, as mine is?" "No, George, I never did," she murmured; "I never, never did! Why?" "Oh, nothing," he replied, "only I wondered whether it was instinct or experience that made you take the reins from my hand just as soon as we reached this secluded spot!"

### He Wasn't Asleep.

Scene: Newly-married pair on bench in park. Old gentleman supposed to be asleep. She: "My darling!" He: "My dove!" She: "My dearest!" He: "My pussy!" She: "My duck!" He: "My pretty birdie!" She: "My goosie!" He: "My kitten!" She: "My chickee!" He: "My lambkin!" Old gentleman (interrupting brutally): "Can't you call each other Noah's Arky, and have done with it?"

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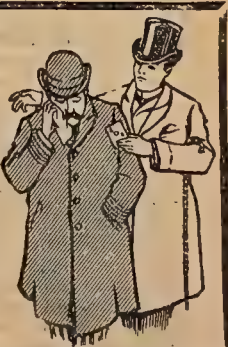

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# THE ALBERT GATE MYSTERY.

. . . Conclusion. . . .

**What the Cockatoo Said.**

"These cigarettes are not so good as Hussein ul Mulk's," said Brett, producing his case.

"No, he has an exquisite taste in tobacco. But I nearly fooled him with the dummy diamonds. I would have done so if it had not been for you. Do you know, Mr. Brett, I have always underrated Englishmen's brains. You are really stupid as a nation"—here Talbot almost blushed—"but you are an exception. You ought to be a Frenchman."

"I suppose I may regard that as a compliment?" remarked Brett casually.

"Take it as you like," said Dubois. "And now that I have told you all that you want to know, I suppose, may I ask you a question of some interest to myself? What is to become of me? Am I to be hanged, or imprisoned, or passed on to the Sultan for treatment?"

Brett was silent for a few moments.

"How much of the five thousand pounds given you by the Turks remains in your possession?" he demanded.

The Frenchman hesitated before replying:

"There is no use lying to you. I have not yet expended the first thousand, although I had to pay pretty dearly for a good many things."

"Why did you come here?" asked the barrister.

"Because I would be safe for some months with a few hospitable gentlemen whom I know up in the hills."

"And then?"

"Then Marguerite and I were going to the Argentine, to dwell in rural felicity, and teach our children to bless the name of Mahomet and Abdul Hamid."

"Marguerite is Mademoiselle Beaucaire?"

"Yes, poor girl! I hear she is ill and in prison, together with her excellent father. Really, Mr. Brett, I cannot help liking you, but I ought to feel anxious to cut your throat."

"In that case you would certainly be hanged. Are you married to Mademoiselle Beaucaire?"

The Frenchman darted a quick and angry look at his inquisitor.

"What has that to do with you?" he snarled.

Dubois' future had already been determined. The rascal was more fortunate than he deserved to be. Owing to the lucky chance that his crime had a political significance he would escape punishment.

The slightest public reference to either the theft of the diamonds or the Sultan's original intentions with regard to them would create such a storm in the Mohammedan world that no man could prophesy the end.

Brett knew exactly how to deal with Dubois. But a fantastic project had arisen in his mind, and he determined to graft it upon the drastic expedient adopted by the authorities.

He abruptly broke off the conversation and told the Frenchman that he would call again during the afternoon.

True to his promise, Talbot and he visted the injured man some hours later. This time they were accompanied by a stout individual and a closely-veiled lady—Grosjean and his daughter.

The meeting between Henri and Marguerite was pathetic. It was at the same time exceedingly French, and somewhat trying to the nerves of the Englishmen.

At last the couple calmed their transports, and Brett promptly recalled them to a proportionate sense of their surroundings by reminding them that there was serious business to be discussed.

"I am commissioned to inform you," he said, addressing Dubois, "that if you proceed direct to the Argentine, never attempt to revisit France, and keep your mouth closed as to your attempt to purloin the Sultan's jewels, you will be set at liberty here, and no effort will be made by the French or British police to arrest you. The infringement of any of these conditions will lead to your extradition and a sentence of penal servitude for life."

"*Ma foi!*" cried the Frenchman, looking intently into the barrister's inscrutable face. "Why such tenderness?"

Brett would not give him time for prolonged reflection.

"I have not yet finished," he said drily. "I imagine that Mlle. Beaucaire cannot produce a marriage certificate. She will be supplied with one, to permit her to travel with you as your lawful wife."

The pair were startled. They somewhat relaxed the close embrace in which they sat. The man's handsome face flushed with anger.

La Belle Chasseuse sat mute and downcast. This personal development came as a complete surprise to her.

Dubois glanced at her covertly. He was still annoyed and defiant; but even he, hardened scoundrel and cynic though he was, could not find words to contest Brett's decision.

The barrister deemed the moment ripe for his final smashing argument. He came somewhat nearer to the bed, and said with exasperating coolness:

"There is a secret room in the Cabaret Noir, the contents of which have not yet been too closely examined by the police. It is in their charge. At my request, backed up by the British Foreign Office, they have thus far deferred a detailed scrutiny. Perhaps if the external influence is removed they may press their investigations to a point when it will be impossible to permit your contemplated voyage to the Argentine. You know best. I have nothing further to say."

Dubois looked at him in moody silence. The Argentine—with £4,000? Yes. But a wife!

In a few moments the Frenchman drew Marguerite closer to him, with his uninjured arm, and said—

"Let us get married, *ma p'tite*. It is essential."

And married they were forthwith, a priest and an official from the Mayor's office being in waiting at the hotel.

Whilst they were signing the register Grosjean motioned Brett to one side.

"Allow me to thank you, M'sieu', for the kindness you have shown," he murmured. "Touching that hidden room in the Cabaret, now. Do the police really know of it?"

"They do."

"Then, M'sieu', I accompany them to the Argentine," and he jerked his thumb towards Dubois and his wife.

Six months later, when the Earl and Countess of Fairholme returned from their wedding tour, Brett was invited to dinner.

Talbot was there, of course, and Daubeney, and Sir Hubert.

"Constantinople must be a queer place," observed Jack after the first rush of animated converse had exhausted itself.

"Surely there are no more diamond mysteries on foot!" cried his charming sister.

"Not exactly; but I made some inquiries through a friend of mine in the Legation. Hussein ul Mulk and his two Paris friends are quite important functionaries in the palace. The other pair of scoundrels came to a bad end.

"Is there any news of Monsieur and Madame Dubois, and the fat man Grosjean?" asked Edith.

"You will receive some in the drawing-room, Lady Fairholme," said Brett.

In the drawing-room her ladyship was delighted to find a splendid cockatoo.

"The happy couple in the Argentine sent him to me to be presented to you on your return," explained the barrister. "He is named 'Le Prophète,' and he talks beautifully—indeed, his language is most emphatic, but it is all French."

"What a darling!" cried Edith. "I do wish he would say something. *Cher Prophète, parlez avec moi!*"

And immediately the cockatoo stretched out his wings and screamed—

"*Vive Mahomet! Vive le Sultan! A bas les Grecs! à bas! à bas!*"

Finis.

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## Catarrh a Constant Cold in the Head.

The medical explanation of the causes and symptoms of catarrh is an interesting item of a quarterly medical Journal just at hand. The Editor is anxious that people should understand the serious consequences which may result from neglect of a cold or of a series of colds in the head. In fact, the beginning of many of the most obstinate forms of catarrh can be traced to what the patient thought a simple cold. This fact is emphasized by a series of cases taken from the records of the Drouet Institute. These cases also serve to illustrate the treatment of catarrh by the Drouet Method, which the Editor points out has been successful in a large proportion of instances after operations and other special procedures have failed. Names and addresses being given, this issue of the "Journal for the Deaf and Review of Diseases of the Nose, Throat and Ears" will be of use to everyone who has any form of catarrh. A free copy of the Journal can be obtained by addressing the Secretary, Drouet Institute, 10 Marble Arch, London, W. The "Journal" also contains a Special Report Form by means of which anyone can obtain free advice as to treatment. The Editor, however, advises patients, whenever possible, to attend the Institute for a personal examination during the consultation hours, week-day mornings, 10 to 12, afternoons, 2 to 4. For personal consultations a fee of 5s. is charged.


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# IN CONFIDENCE

Conducted by CYNTHIA.

*[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.*]*

### *A Trifling Toast.*

FANNIE has known a man for some time, and been friendly with him. She likes him very much, but so far he has given no hint of having any deep feeling for her. The other day, before leaving their house, she offered him a glass of claret, and he drank it saying "My best love to you." Ever since that, FANNIE had been wondering whether it should be taken as a hint for her.

* * * * *

I fear such remarks as that over wine are only too frequent to be taken seriously. It was very likely just his nice little way of proposing your health. After all, "health" is a very overdone thing to wish people, and "respects" would have been formal. "Love" was the right thing to say, and he said it. Don't treat it too seriously. If he means it, he will want more of your claret, as it appears to be the only means by which he cares to express feelings at all.

❦❦❦

### *A Sudden Change.*

X AND Y were engaged for five years. X, the man, suddenly drops Y, but Y still loves him. Is this explicable after five years of courtship?

* * * * *

It looks as though X has tired of Y. Give him a rest, and see if he comes back. Perhaps he thinks he is fonder of somebody else. He is probably wrong and will realise it. Five years is a long test, and few men could have continued so long unless there were a very real attachment between him and the girl. But I daresay he has got into a groove and wants a change. The engagement is altogether too long. Unless he repents very soon, try to get him out of your thoughts.

❦❦❦

### *An Unfair Advantage.*

AILSA'S lover is going to Australia, and expects to be there ten years. AILSA is twenty. The young man wants to become engaged to her before he goes out. Would I recommend this course?

* * * * *

No, certainly not. It would be quite unfair to bind yourself to any such engagement. If you are really lovers, you should have a distinct understanding, but not a binding engagement. To expect you to wait until you are thirty before marrying is very unfair to you.

* * * * *

You may alter your mind about the young man in a year or so, and might quite easily meet someone at home who would attract you more. If the young man thinks there is a chance of your going out to him to become his wife within a certain time, you will consult your own inclinations in the matter of an engagement. I am assuming there is no likelihood of that.

### *Marrying Again.*

"How soon after his wife's death should a man marry again?" F. G., who inquires this, has several children, and his home badly wants attention which he cannot give himself.

* * * * *

Under such circumstances, it is quite permissible to marry a year afterwards. Not so much because you have forgotten your first wife, as because on a mere common-sense basis a man must have somebody to manage his home. I advise somebody of your own age. A young and attractive woman who marries a man for the sake of becoming mistress of a home would probably be entering a fatal tangle.

❦❦❦

### *A Man's Column Proposed.*

A MERE MAN is annoyed because there is no column dealing with men in *Short Stories*. He thinks men should be able to read of matters affecting them quite as much as women, including directions as to dress, manners, and general affairs.

* * * * *

I am always pleased to chat with men on any matters on which they may want a hint. A woman is often able to give hints, even in business matters, which, though inexperienced, may quite possibly hit the nail on the head. As to men's dress, I do not really believe there are many men who want to read about such things, excepting, of course, dandies.

* * * * *

The great test of a well-dressed man nowadays is neatness and the absence of display. Men who have the instinct to dress well cannot be improved by anything they may read, while those who have not that instinct are seldom able to learn. As to etiquette, there are certainly many points on which one has much to learn, and many of my male readers who are in doubt on such matters should drop me a line.

❦❦❦

### *The Language of Lilies.*

WINNIE is a Sunday School teacher. Some time ago, one of the gentlemen teachers appeared with a bunch of lilies in his buttonhole, which WINNIE coveted. In a mischievous moment she asked him for them, and he at once handed the flowers over. Since that, every Sunday the young man has appeared with a bunch of lilies, and has each time presented them to WINNIE. Am I to read this as a sign that he is in love with her? His manners generally have not suggested anything of the kind.

* * * * *

I think you were a trifle forward, WINNIE. The young man could not, of course, refuse to comply with your request in the first instance, and being no doubt a bit of a courtier, thought it a happy idea to bring the flowers regularly. Perhaps he is a little bit of a flirt, and rather fancied the compliment you paid him by asking for his flowers. Don't place too much reliance on what you think is behind it. It is probably nothing more than a pretty compliment on his part.

❦❦❦

### *Introduction.*

WILL many correspondents please remember what I have several times stated—that I cannot act as an agent for introducing couples to whom I have given advice. Neither can I announce anything in the nature of advertisements on this page. I hope those who continually ask me to do so will take this as final. If I agreed to do it once, I must consent to always, and the Editor of this paper does not want to become a matrimonial agent.

*Cynthia.*

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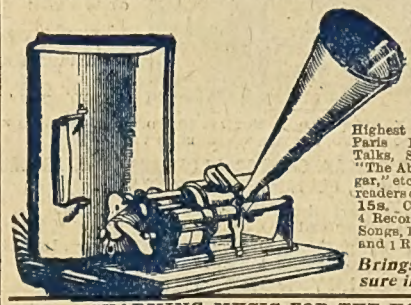

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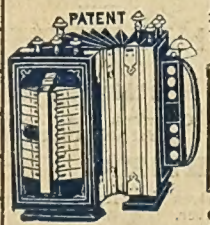


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